

## Leading Change

—Virginia Franco, Chief Executive Officer

Recently I read Robert Quinn's book *Building the Bridge as You Walk on It*. It has helped me better articulate to Life Steps partners the vision of the deep change we have undertaken.

We have gone through changes before, but the current process is more challenging because we strive to change not only the organizational structure but also ourselves. Our goal is to transform our core, our inner self—to align it with the organization's core values. Only then can we sustain change for the long run. This requires that we develop integrity of purpose, the courage to challenge the pseudo-reality we have lived, one that feels comfortable because it is familiar. Familiarity with what we know always makes us feel more secure. However, it can also limit our ability to grow because it precludes us from taking risks that come with exploring new ways of learning.

Integrity of purpose means the willingness to question the "truths" we have unconsciously assimilated as a byproduct of the status quo mentality in which we have functioned. It means having the courage to acknowledge these "truths" as hypocritical and to change accordingly.

Five years ago I sensed a gradual stagnation in Life Steps. We performed work perfunctorily and, consequently, disconnected with our mission (purpose) and core values. We were too busy fending off budget cuts, resource shortages, economic downturns in the state, and political morass. Gradually we lost sight of our mission and began dying a slow death.

My perceptions became more focused during the past two years as I examined this trend and asked what we were doing, where we were going and where we really wanted to go. To answer these questions I had to first evaluate myself personally and professionally—how was I living the core values I had established for Life Steps? I concluded that we were no longer functioning according to our mission. Critical questions needed answers:

- We profess to be a learning organization. What have we actually learned for the past few years?
- We say we are committed to increasing self-sufficiency and maximizing individual potential. Do we show integrity of purpose to partners regarding these goals by maintaining a centralized operation?
- We value creativity, are solution oriented. How are we living this core value?
- We are trendsetters, always ahead of the pack. What have we done lately to prove that?
- How must we change to reignite the vitality of Life Steps?

I realized that we needed to get back on track; we needed to start this transformational process by transforming ourselves.

The outcome of this soul searching became the transition to self-sufficiency, now in its second year of implementation. When I proposed changing to a self-sufficiency organizational model, I did nothing more than live the values created when I founded Life Steps. This change goes farther than any other we have experienced throughout our organization's existence. It is intended to change our individual and organizational cores;

impact the way we feel and think; challenge misconceptions and biases we have acquired; and stop the descent into mediocrity. We are aiming for a rebirth!

All Life Steps partners must understand that the challenge of change I present to you is not superficial. We have to question ourselves very deeply about our level of authenticity. How objective are we? Can we identify hypocritical behaviors? We are good people, but we need to align ourselves with our mission toward self-sufficiency if we're to successfully ensure Life Steps' legacy.

Is this an easy process? No! It is very scary to leave our comfort zone. The reality, however, is that we can continue to move toward entropy and be dead in another five to 10 years, or we can search in earnest for a better way of operating.

I invite you all to join me in this journey. As explorers we are traveling unknown territory, learning as we move ahead. It entails a leap of faith and a lot of heart. It requires much trust from me to you and vice versa, and the ability to welcome learning as it occurs. We must have courage to proceed amid ambiguity and view challenges as opportunities, not threats. Until we complete the process, we have no safe ground, no familiar truths with which to anchor ourselves—only one another's support during the journey, which we hope will yield a new reality, one more aligned with our vision and needs.