



**A Word of Thanks and a Word of Challenge to the ILA**

**Remarks by Jean Lipman-Blumen - ILA Lifetime Achievement Award  
Recipient -**

**Thursday - October 28, 2010**

Dear Honored Guests, Colleagues, Friends, and Family:

Abraham Lincoln once remarked: “Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak out and remove all doubt.” But today, throwing caution to the winds, I’ll forego Lincoln’s good advice and respond to this unexpected, but cherished, award with a few words.

In 10 minutes or less, I want to express how profoundly moved and grateful I am to ILA for this award, both because of its unusual circumstances, as well as its intrinsic meaning. Then, very briefly, I’d like to pose a special challenge that ILA is uniquely qualified to address.

To begin with the unusual circumstances of this award, by chance, the announcement letter arrived on my birthday! What an incredible gift! Of course, next year’s birthday clearly will be a huge letdown.

Again by chance, the presentation is occurring in the town of my birth, Boston. This has special meaning to me for several reasons, both bad and good.

Let’s start with the bad: Growing up in Boston, with its predilection for producing scoundrel-leaders, I avoided studying leadership until midway in my career. You may recall James Michael Curley, a major political figure in Boston. He was twice elected from a prison cell, first to the Board of Aldermen, later to the position of Mayor of Boston. As Mayor, Curley ran the city of Boston for 5 months from a prison cell before being released and later fully pardoned by Pres. Truman. So, you can see how growing up in Boston predisposed me to see leadership through a glass darkly.

Now, let's turn to the good. Receiving this award in my birthplace has several very positive aspects. First, it holds special existential meaning to me, to return to the scene of my early life for this unexpected, but much appreciated, recognition. Second, being in Boston has the added delight of making it possible for many of my dearest family members to join the celebration.

Having spoken rather lightly about the unusual circumstances of this award, let me turn to a second issue, and speak seriously from my heart about the intrinsic meaning this award holds for me.

It is impossible to convey how truly appreciative and humbled I am to receive this award from this group of scholars and practitioners whose professional accomplishments simply blow me away. ILA's high intellectual and professional standards inspire immense respect throughout the worlds of academia and practice, and well beyond. Besides, being selected in the company of the other awardees whom I so greatly admire makes me feel I am flying way "above my pay grade."

I often speak of ILA's two-fold uniqueness that distinguishes it from other academic and professional associations. First, ILA is unique in the challenge it undertook 12 years ago to bring together the highest levels of scholarship with the most innovative and integrity-infused efforts in leadership practice so that scholarship might inform practice, and practice might serve as a real-life corrective for scholarship. No other organization I know has undertaken such an audacious task.

It is unique in another way as well: ILA is singularly perfused with the concern its founders (like Jim MacGregor Burns, Georgia Sorenson, Lorraine Matusak, Warren Bennis, Gil Hickman, Ron Heifetz, Cyn Cherry, & others) epitomize for consequential and cutting-edge, but emphatically civil, intellectual, and practice-oriented discourse despite the scientific and pragmatic differences we all might have. ILA shines as a beacon of civil discourse in this era of deafening personalized and bitter political dialogue.

On both counts, ILA is truly unique and admirable. To be recognized by such an extraordinary organization takes my breath away.

But I would be remiss indeed, if I did not point out the obvious: that, without my own professors and mentors, fantastic students, past and present, many of whom are here, particularly Sarah Smith Orr, Lyn Cason, Kathy Pelletier, and Maura Harrington,

my colleagues, friends, and family everywhere, particularly my beloved collaborator, Hal Leavitt, my editor at Oxford, Herb Addison, and Denise Marcil, as well as my esteemed home institution, the Drucker/Ito Graduate School of Management and the entire Claremont Graduate University, with its remarkable faculty and administrators, this never could have happened. And without ILA's superb staff, Shelly, Josh, Debra, Ashley, Evan, and others, we wouldn't have the continuing excellence of this great association. Thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

In these closing two minutes, I want to pose a special challenge to ILA at this historic Leadership 2.0: Time for Action Conference: That is, to address the central question, "Leadership for What?" What should be the action goal of all this leadership research, teaching, and leadership practice if not the noblest goal of all: the achievement and on-going promotion of peace, which then enables us to redirect our resources and attention to remaining great challenges? Leadership Action for Peace is the challenge I pose to ILA today.

For without peace, we squander our valuable and limited resources so desperately needed to confront the teeming unmet needs of humankind: that is, poverty, health, education, famine, climate change and the environment, shelter, and economic stability around the globe. By accepting this challenge, we'll undoubtedly discover that we have also met our own human need for meaning and significance that Victor Frankl so passionately urged us to fulfill. We'll also discover our deep bonds and connections to the rest of humankind, as expressed in the concept of "ubuntu," translated as "a person is a person through (other) persons"—only this time, it will be "ubuntu in action."

Since I believe ideas without implementation go nowhere, (at the risk of meeting Lincoln's worst fears) let me conclude with 30-seconds of an implementation strategy: that is, the ILA should connect to other major groups concerned with achieving and maintaining worldwide peace to establish jointly an on-going, robust presence at the United Nations (and/or any other wide-reaching, effective forum dedicated to peace). ILA should lead the way. We should have a strong voice in international policy for peace.

Having a voice in the international policy dialogue will open new doors to peace. Then, when we are asked, "Leadership for What?", we may answer unabashedly: "Leadership for lasting peace that redirects our resources to fulfill humankind's most

critical unmet needs. Then and only then, will we enjoy Maslow's apex of transcendence, of self-forgetfulness and altruism that enables "ubuntu in action." I profoundly believe that taking up this challenge will ultimately lead us all to deeper understanding and connections in every sphere of life." May ILA lead the way!

Thank you all for this cherished award and for considering this proposal.



Left to Right: Ron Riggio, Bernice Ledbetter, Jean Lipman-Blumen, during the panel discussion "Leadership for What? When Peace Is the Primary Answer" at ILA 2010