



2008
NATIONAL COUNCIL SESSION
51ST CONVENTION
Girl Scouts Can Lead Anywhere

“GREAT LEADERS ARE GREAT SERVANTS”

Connie L. Lindsey—2008 Girl Scout NCS/51st Convention Address

Thank you. Dr. Scott, Cynthia, Elinor, I stand here today because of the trail you blazed for me and for EVERY Sister Girl Scout.

Author Zora Neale Hurston said it is a powerful thing that neither time nor distance can diminish. While she was speaking about the power of love, I think this sentiment is appropriate for our Movement.

Patricia, all of your life, but especially during these last three years, you have been a woman, a Girl Scout, and a leader of awe-inspiring courage, confidence, and character. You haven't just talked about what you would do for our Movement, you have *done it*.

We *have* more Latina Girl Scouts than at any time in our history; we *have* launched a Girl Scout Leadership Experience where all girls can discover the strongest qualities of their values and character, and connect with other girls who are making that same journey of positive self-discovery. Together, as Girl Scout sisters, they take action to make our world a better place.

Patricia, we can celebrate today because of your tenacity and intellectual perspicacity. My grandmother used to say, “Cover *all* the ground you stand on.” And my Sister, that is exactly what you have done.

Kathy, thank you for your indefatigable commitment to leadership and to our Movement. Three years of working with you has been a tremendous honor and I am looking forward to continuing our proactive partnership.

Patricia and Kathy, you both are great leaders because you both are great servants. You have served the best interests of our girls by making certain that our Movement has the structure, the focus, and the programs to sustain another century engaged in this sacred work of preparing girls to become leaders—the leaders of today, the leaders we will come to know, and the leaders yet to be born.

Patricia and Kathy, we thank you for the personal sacrifices you've made and everything you've accomplished by your courageous leadership.

The first and best decision I can make as your new National Board Chair is to continue our tradition of Servant Leadership—and that is exactly what I intend to do.

We have led by serving girls from that night of March 12, 1912, when Daisy Low made a call which changed the lives of girls forever. She telephoned her cousin and said: “*I have something for the girls of Savannah, and all of America and all the world and we're going to start tonight!*”

Notice that Daisy Low did not say, “I have something that will bring me great fame and fortune,” though she is loved and revered by history. She said, “I have something for *all the girls* of the world.”



Daisy was a powerful example of Servant Leadership, because she understood that the best leaders are those who help others to become their best.

Juliette Gordon Low did not know me, but this Girl Scout Community she founded, our 'great circle of friends united by ideals,' changed my life.

I joined Girl Scouts almost forty years ago at my church in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. And this great circle of friends opened wide, welcomed me, and loved me for the girl that I was—and for the leader I could become. My mom couldn't afford to buy my uniform, but that didn't matter. My church—and my troop leader, Mrs. Pearline James—through their generosity, ensured that I had a proper uniform.

Girl Scouting helped me understand that I was a young girl who *mattered*, not only to God, but also to my community. The Servant Leadership we must provide to girls starts telling them what my troop leader told me over forty years ago: "Young lady, you matter—and don't let anybody in this world tell you that you don't."

But telling our girls that they matter isn't enough. We show them that they matter to us and our world by empowering them with the leadership opportunities that prove to them that the ideas and dreams they have right now—the ones which give their lives meaning and purpose—are right.

They are *right* to believe in their ideals and they are *right* to believe in themselves. And we will show girls and the world why our Movement remains the best place to transform a girl's best ideas and aspirations into the powerful, purposeful reality of her life.

We prove that we are true Servant Leaders by giving girls who are with us today and those who will enter our great circle of friends in the days to come, opportunities to discover within themselves, their gifts and talents!

Our girls are planning for and dreaming of a world that we here today cannot imagine.

We want girls to be inspired to discover their unique talents, to nourish those talents, and to grow them into their power to cure diseases that today remain incurable, to develop technologies and entire new industries—and in fact, an entirely new world that, today, lies beyond our understanding.

We must connect all girls who are discovering the best of themselves. Our Movement possesses the most wonderful kind of energy. Girls plug in to us and to other girls striving to be great leaders, and those talents which were shrouded in darkness are suddenly, brilliantly illuminated.

Our Young Women of Distinction show us that taking action happens in that moment where fear is minimized and faith is maximized. They prove that every girl has the power to discover, connect and take action—that every girl has within herself the potential to lead.

I've shared what Servant Leadership means to me; now let me describe the type of Servant Leadership I will give to you and the kind of Servant Leadership we must contribute to our girls and to each other:



First, the board and I will be accountable not just for what we say—we will be accountable for what we do. We will keep the Girl Scout Movement relevant in the lives of girls for another one hundred years.

Moving forward with our Core Business Strategy keeps us accountable for the future of our Movement and to the girls who need us today and in all the days ahead.

Our accomplishments with the Core Business Strategy have been impressive, but our work remains unfinished. Being accountable means ensuring that our councils are strong and well-positioned to provide girls with the staff, volunteers, resources, programs, and experiences they need to develop their leadership potential.

Everyone here today loves girls and loves the Girl Scout Movement. But our girls and our Movement cannot live on love alone. Building girls of courage, confidence, and character comes with a continued and ever-increasing demand for sustainable financial growth.

I am a Girl Scout and I am a financial services professional. I love girls and I love to see large numbers followed by lots of zeros, preceded by the words “Pay to the Order of the Girl Scouts.”

But here is a large number I don't like: Household wealth has declined by eight trillion dollars [source: Merrill Lynch], since August 2007. Wallets are snapping shut, resources are scarce, and we need to rely on more than a contributor's sentimental attachment to the mission of our Movement in order to thrive during this challenging time.

Accountability starts by investing every dollar that we earn or that is donated by generous individuals and corporate partners in building a magnetic brand and delivering programs that work.

We must be able to prove that our return on investment has increased opportunities for more girls to acquire the skills, experience, and confidence to become their very own success story.

Together, we are accountable to become the change we wish to see in our Movement and in the world. Today, and for the next three years, and for the next century, the Girl Scout Movement will have one direction—and that direction is forward, and moving *at the speed of girl*.

Almost a century ago, Daisy Low told us, “Girl Scouting is not just knowing, but doing... [and] not just doing, but being.”

I've talked about being accountable—to you, to our mission, and most importantly, to our girls. Being accountable means being accessible, inclusive, and collaborative with a commitment to positive action. Toward that end, we will execute in the next triennium an Advisory Board of Council Chairs that will ensure enhanced collaboration, communication, and excellence in execution.

I will be accessible to you. You can always count on me to listen to you, and you can count on us—the Board and the Leadership Team—to make decisions that are in the best interests of our Movement and the girls we must serve.



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So my sisters, here are the types of Servant Leaders we must be:

We will lead by serving girls *first, foremost, and always.*

We will hold ourselves accountable for all that we do. Because the truth isn't found in what we've said to one another; the truth is found in what we've done for one another.

We will lead by making our desire to grow far stronger than our fear of change. After all, change is inevitable; growth is optional.

We will Serve, we will Lead, and most importantly, we will EXECUTE. We will execute, because we have a promise to keep to the girls with us today—and to girls everywhere:

Girls, *you matter.* Leadership is your birthright. We love you.

Poet Patrick Overton said, "When you walk to the edge of all the light you have and take that first step into the darkness of the unknown, you must believe that one of two things will happen: There will be something solid for you to stand upon, or you will be taught how to fly."

Let's fly as we Discover, Connect, and Take Action.

THANK YOU.