

LADRENA McDOWELL, DALLAS To Open My Treasure Tower

When I first heard of the restructuring of our organization, fear, anger and determination immediately surfaced. I am really not sure which emotion was more dominant, probably determination. You see, I felt victimized in the past of so-called reorganizing and was always hurt or disappointed with the lack of consideration for the members. This time, I was not going to let that happen again. I was determined to speak out about the injustices I felt had been done in the past, and as a district leader, I was going to protect the members.

I chanted tearful, fearful daimoku: I would NOT let it happen without a fight. My strategy was of nothing but the Lotus Sutra, and then to take action. So without much thought, I attended a restructuring meeting and found out just what “these people” were about to do. I don’t think anyone there doubted that I did not have a very good feeling about this change. You see, in “my world,” our district was doing great. Although we were small, we were experiencing tremendous unity and growth. We were always coming up with community activities and doing tremendous propagation. As a result, we increased our membership by 30 percent.

I found out through these restructuring meetings that not all districts were progressing, not all district meetings were joyful. In fact, many members were suffering. I also found that this “restructuring” was a movement to alleviate that suffering and to make us visible within our communities. I was beginning to see a bigger picture, but I still held ground on my opposition.

At the second restructuring meeting, committees were formed to tackle the objectives. I had such a need to be on top of all the decision-making factors that I was in a dilemma as to which committee to join. I joined two, the Data Base and the Survey, which I felt were most important to the task. In the committee activities, particularly the Survey Committee, we decided to chant 30 minutes before each meeting. Needless to say, lots of good ideas came out of that meeting. What was appealing to me about that first meeting was that gongyo was led by a woman and coffee was prepared by the men. Already, we had started “restructuring,” and I started getting excited about the possibility of OOOH, CHANGE.

In February I attended a conference at the Florida Nature and Culture Center. I talked with members from throughout the United States regarding the reorganization. Many had gone through the reorganization, some were in the beginning stages, some were greatly affected and others barely affected. In every case, the end product was a much better local organization.

The lecture presented at the FNCC was on the Treasure Tower, and we were encouraged to open up our Treasure Tower. I realized that while I had been so protective of the members in my district, I had created such a small world for myself. My perspective had been so limited. I made a determination to open my Treasure Tower, embrace the restructuring activities, and sincerely chant for the happiness of all the members in the Texas Region.

The first Saturday, March 1, after my return from the FNCC and with the support of my family and the members of my district, I began classes to obtain my adjuster’s license for Workers Compensation. This position had opened several times and each time I had held it on an interim basis, doing the work but never getting the job because I lacked my license.

With my determination to open up my life, my Treasure Tower, I viewed this situation as a challenge. It would take 12 Saturdays to complete this course. All of our district activities were on Saturdays, and since I worked all week, there was very little time to

spend with my children, do housework, activities or study. Now I had this added responsibility as a reorganization committee member. My solution was to “pump up the daimoku!” I did, and at the end of the 12 weeks, I completed the course with a grade of 97 out of a 100. The final exam was on a Saturday. My supervisor and director wished me well the Friday before.

The following Monday, the whole environment in my office changed. There was a staff meeting at which I thought my graduation and impending license and promotion would be announced. To my surprise, it was instead announced that the adjuster’s position would not be filled. Efficiency consultants had been going into each department, we were told, and reducing staff. Our budget had been cut considerably, and one of the sacrifices was the open position, the one I had prepared for.

For some reason, I accepted the news with comfort, thinking, “Oh, well, at least I gained more knowledge and met some really great people over the past few months. When the time comes, I’m sure I will be able to use my license in some other capacity.”

The next day, Tuesday, things got more serious. My supervisor called me into her office for counseling. She said that I had made several errors, that the quality of my work was slipping, and that I was leaving early too many times (I had left twice to pick up my son from school in one year). All this was totally out of left field, unfounded, untrue, a complete fabrication. My first reaction was to be furious, but instead of giving into that, I signed the bogus report and indicated to my supervisor that I would continue to strive for excellence.

This time, when I sat in front of the Gohonzon, it was with a feeling of great appreciation, an opportunity to turn all this poison into elixir. I must continue to fight this ugliness in my life. I must not begrudge this opportunity to change my karma.

I reported to work the next morning as cheerful as ever. My co-workers were watching me closely. When I dropped a file, everyone jumped and my supervisor came rushing out of her office to ask me what was the matter. “I just dropped a file,” I replied and looked at her with a big smile. She looked at me, surprised to see me not angry or upset. I realized then that this was some sort of test to see how I can stand the pressure. Well, it was no contest, because I was not angry or upset, I had accepted my negative karma and was working diligently to change it.

Meanwhile, the restructuring activities took on an even deeper meaning for me. I was filled with confidence that I would win over my challenges at work, and I used the restructuring activities as my springboard to eradicate negativity in my life.

Within two weeks of my counseling session, I would overhear my supervisor praising my work and my attitude. She even told me that I was the brightest thing in her life. She looked forward to coming to work because I was there.

Oh, and by the way, effective June 18, I was promoted to Workers Compensation adjuster. Mine was the only promotion within the human resources division, and they even hired a part-time clerk to assist me.

I know this was all the benefit of my practice, without a doubt, and I can tell you now that I am truly excited about the reorganization of the Dallas/Fort Worth area. I am confident that all the members are being taken into consideration, and I feel so very fortunate to be a part of an organization that continually strives for improvement.

As stated in the June 13, 1997, *World Tribune* editorial: “‘From our standpoint as SGI members,’ writes SGI President Ikeda, ‘the community in which we live, our area of specialty, our occupation and our families all are our “garden” of kosen-rufu. We must cultivate and develop this garden.’”

Thank you for letting me share a part of my life with you.

WT