

Lessons from the Purple Tree by Linda Felker Business Book

Lessons From The Purple Tree

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## Introduction

**M**ary Ruth Fox is an extraordinary artist. With what appears to be very little effort, she creates original, true-to-life oil paintings that are so realistic you can actually “feel” them. Her talent is God-given, and she uses this ability to touch the lives of others.

Mary Ruth is gracious and gentle, and works tirelessly and patiently to use her skill to the fullest, yet she seeks no recognition. She has a kind, generous nature. Best of all, Mary Ruth is my Mother.

My sister Sue inherited mother’s artistic talent and ability. I did not.

I was four years, and Sue was six. My sister and I were sitting in straight-back chairs around the kitchen table working diligently in our coloring books. Sue was precise, and in control as she chose the right colors to complete her masterpiece. Sue even embellished her picture by using a pencil to draw a fence around the house and put additional flowers on her page. Each swipe of her crayon was perfection, and she always colored within the lines.

Even at four years old, I knew I could not color as well as my sister. I would never be able to draw and color, like

Sue, and certainly never come close to being artistic like my mother. My sister Sue had all the talent!

That particular day, my mother was standing at the kitchen stove, cooking dinner, and Sue said, "Hey mama, come look at my picture. I added a fence around the house, and drew in a few flowers to make it prettier."

Mother wiped her hands on a towel, and then stepped over to the table. She looked at Sue's color page, and said, "This is absolutely beautiful, Sue. I really like the way you added depth to your picture with the fence."

I sat there silently, and did not offer my color page to mother because I did not want her to see that my picture was not pretty like Sue's picture. I just could not color as well as Sue did, and I felt that I would never be able to measure up to Sue's artistic ability.

I would never be part of what they had in common. In my mind, I felt like my color page was ugly, and I started to crumple it up to throw it into the trash can.

Before I could do that, Sue said, "Hey Mama, look at what Linda did to her picture! She colored her tree PURPLE!"

I felt like sliding out of my chair and under the kitchen table because I did not want to disappoint my mother when she saw my coloring page. She would never be proud of it the way she was of Sue's picture.

Mother walked around the table, and picked up my paper. She studied it carefully for a moment, then said, "Linda, I love this picture. It shows true originality."

My sister laughed aloud, and said, "But mama, she colored the tree PURPLE! Everyone knows trees are green."

The next words my mother said to me are forever inscribed in my memory. She said, "Linda, this is *your* tree. You can color it any color you want to."

As I sat there dejectedly staring at the floor, my mother continued. "You could have used the green crayon for your tree, and that would have been good. But you chose the purple crayon, and created something unique and individual to you. All the colors are beautiful. It is YOUR TREE. Color it any color you want."

"But mama", I cried. "Sue laughed at my picture. How could it be good like you said?" Mother cupped my face in her hands, and gently replied, "Linda, for the rest of your life there will be people who may not like what you create, or agree with what you do. You must decide what's best for you to do, and then do your very best with it."

"Just like you chose to color the tree purple, you will make choices that will decide the direction of your life. As long as your choices are based on doing the right thing and not hurting someone else, then your life will be full of bright colors, and purple trees."

I will never forget how proud I felt at that moment. And, I will always remember the greater lesson I learned that day about the colors of the world. My mother thought she was offering encouraging words to me regarding my coloring page. What she actually gave me was a far great gift.

She gave me the inspiration to be myself, the desire to help others, and the belief that using my own talents and gifts would help me accomplish my life goals.

Of course, at four years old, I did not comprehend the enormity of my mother's words at the kitchen table when she talked about my purple tree. As I grew older, I began to see the full outreach of what she said. As an adult, and as a professional, I value those words even more and the lessons they teach.

Trust is the first lesson gained from my purple tree and my mother's comforting words. Nothing of value can be

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successfully built, maintained, or enhanced without a solid foundation of Trust and Respect.

Trust is at the core of interpersonal relationships, as well as corporate structure. It takes a true leader to build a foundation of trust that can withstand today's corporate environment.

The next lesson from the Purple Tree is the importance of Vision, Mission, and Goals. Through her words and consistently strong example, my mother taught me that a life without purpose is full of missed opportunities and unfulfilled dreams.

The Purple Tree was born out of a four-year-old's vision of color. Once created, it was a reflection of the inner imaginings of a child, transferred to paper for all to see.

Leaders must establish and make decisions based on the overall goal of the organization. The corporate vision must be so clear that employees can see and understand it, and thereby comprehend their role within the company, and perform accordingly.

Strong leadership skill is essential to ensure the corporate mission is clear, vivid, and full of color to everyone in the company. Without an intense understanding of "why we do the work we do", the company may not be able to sustain even marginal success in today's world of tremendous competition and continuous change.

People who share a common sense of purpose can get where they are going quicker and easier, and will positively impact others who share the same goals.

The third lesson from The Purple Tree is Communication. My mother appropriately communicated with me on a level that I could understand and digest. She spoke the right words, at the right time, for the right reason, and to the right person. Her method of

communicating was powerful enough to instill a lifelong desire for success into the mind of a child.

Leaders must communicate well in order to drive that intensive degree of desire and acceptance into the workforce.

Feedback is the fourth lesson from The Purple Tree. Mother knew how to give feedback, and never hesitated to offer it to any of her children. Mom's feedback was immediate. She did not put off giving necessary feedback, although, at times, it was difficult. She felt that children would not understand the message if she waited until 'later' to discuss the issue.

And, her feedback was balanced. She always spoke about what I was doing *right* as well as what needed changing or improving. Feedback from my mother was motivating and encouraging, as well as corrective.

There is a tremendously valuable lesson for the corporate world relating to providing employee feedback. Mother's methods were quite simple, but enormously successful.

The fifth lesson is Commitment. Without commitment, my mother would not have been able to instill the values, principles, and legacy of superior performance in her children and family. Her dedication and enthusiasm in creating an inclusive environment, and providing encouragement to others, resulted in a lasting commitment from those whose lives she touched.

These five lessons are very simple concepts, yet many leaders struggle to accept and implement them into their work and personal lives. It takes dedication, time, and energy, but the rewards and benefits are worth the effort.

When an organization masters all five of these principles, they will reap solid benefits. The company and the employees will benefit from increased career and

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business opportunities, higher, more efficient productivity, greater job satisfaction, higher work quality, and reduced stress.

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