

## Leadership begins at home

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By Sheryl Aikman

My mother died last July.

I had become a mother myself only a few months before she -- a first-time, and delighted, grandmother -- received a devastating cancer diagnosis.

When the call came, I swung into action.

I spent hours on internet research and networking with friends to advise my mother on her treatment options.

I made lists, a hyper-organized notebook of medical, insurance and financial information, appointments and phone calls.

We decided my mother should move 400 miles from West Virginia to Asheville, N.C., so that I could, as my brother was already doing, participate in the day-to-day grind of medical appointments, treatments and care.

From the beginning, I said my priorities were to keep nursing my baby and to be present in my mother's journey.

So I nursed the baby, which meant getting up several times during the night.

My job, to which I had just returned after maternity leave, didn't even make the list.

Spring became summer, and my mother got sicker.

As the days unfolded, I pared things away that previously would have been categorized as non-negotiable.

If you've said that you put family first, your integrity is on the line when that requires sitting for hours in an uncomfortable chair in a cold hospital room.

If your intention is to secure good medical care for your loved one, being a leader may mean confronting unwieldy bureaucracies and your own fear.

Being present to my mother's dying meant that I had to talk with her about what she believed happens after death, risking that I would hear a perspective very different from my own.

And through the entire journey, I had to learn over and over that to walk with my mother, I had to lean on others -- the medical staff who cared for her, the clergy who ministered to her, the neighbors and friends who fed my family and walked my dogs.

I had always thought that my greatest leadership challenge would come at work, where my success or

failure would be quite public.

And maybe that challenge will come my way.

But the challenge I faced last year as I accompanied my mother through her dying called on what I learned true leadership to be -- digging to the deepest parts of the soul and putting love into action in the service of something bigger than self.

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