

JAMES M. KOUZES & BARRY Z. POSNER

THE
**FIVE PRACTICES OF
EXEMPLARY
LEADERSHIP[®]**



Non-Profit

FROM THE BEST-SELLING AUTHORS OF *THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE* AND *LEADERSHIP PRACTICES INVENTORY (LPI)*

Erna L. Grasz

CEO, FOUNDER, AND CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD,
ASANTE AFRICA FOUNDATION, INC., www.asanteafrica.org

GLOBAL HEADQUARTERS: Livermore, California

EMPLOYEES: two in Tanzania, two in Kenya, two in USA, plus thirty-two volunteers

BUSINESS: A nonprofit charitable organization that collaborates with East African communities to increase access to primary and secondary education and improve the quality of learning for children.

“In my village, they think only boys can be a doctor, that girls cannot be a doctor. So I want to be an example to them.”

—ROSEMARY

ASANTE-SPONSORED SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENT

Asante is the Swahili word for thank you. And there are now more than nineteen thousand students and teachers, in more than eighteen schools, extremely thankful to Erna Grasz for her vision and leadership in bringing opportunity, choice, and possibility to their small African villages.

Today a young boy in Tanzania is able to land a paying job in a grocery store because he can read and write English and count money.

Instead of becoming, at age ten, the sixth wife of a sixty-five-year-old man from her village, a young woman is pursuing her dream of someday being a nurse—and is number 1 in her class of 142 students.

While trekking on safari through Tanzania and Kenya in late 2005, Erna and her husband met several people from local villages who were working hard to develop solutions to their communities' persistent problems, including lack of access to such basic resources as food and water, and to education. One woman in particular was building a school—brick by brick, stone by stone—to provide a place of education for the children of a local village. Time and again, Erna was struck by the power of that generous act: building a school and unleashing its potential to transform a community from the inside out, by educating the village's future leaders.

Having grown up in a single-parent home in extreme economic times, Erna had experienced first-hand the positive impact that the generosity of others can have on a child. As the first in her extended family to go to college, Erna went on to complete her master's in electrical



engineering and engineering management and to become a life-long believer in the power of education, of self-confidence, and of having a vision for the future. As a result, while Erna returned to the U.S. and back into her corporate vice president role at Tyco Healthcare, she began to find ways to support development in those sister countries, starting small at first by providing a few East African youth with the same benefits of education that she had come to know.

What began as Erna's "**after-work hours**" passion has evolved into what is now the Asante Africa Foundation, an international, charitable non-profit grounded in the belief that every child deserves access to quality education—regardless of the longitude or latitude in which he or she is born. Collaborating with local leaders, educators, and parents, the Foundation promotes education that empowers children to make informed decisions, turn dreams into reality, reduce family struggles, and help communities become self-sustaining.

"We would all prefer to rescue ourselves, rather than be rescued," Erna observed. **"That is why we work hard to listen to our local partners, to help community leaders become stronger in their own right, and to help them fully realize what *they* believe is the right solution to their cultural challenges."** When teachers at a primary school in Tanzania were asked what they needed, for example, they replied that they had a single math textbook for one hundred students. Plus, kids were learning as they sat on rocks and dirt. **"When we listen carefully and find out what people really need, we can respond in the best way possible—in this case, with textbooks and desks,"** Erna added.

As CEO and chairman of the board for the Asante Africa Foundation, Erna continues to lead efforts to build collaborations that deliver quality education to the youth of Tanzania and Kenya with funding for schools, advanced teacher training and educational resources, and elementary through high school scholarships. And she continues to spread her passionate belief that everyone can play a part in creating change—regardless of age, economic status, or geography. When local Foundation partner Madame Yohana Mcha was asked recently why she would strive so hard when it is only a drop in the ocean and the need is so great, she replied: **"Ah, but it is one very concentrated drop. It will slowly ripple outward to affect BIG change. These young people will be the future leaders and change agents of our world."** Well said, Madame Mcha.

"Each of us is blessed with talents, skills, and gifts that can be shared," Erna added.

"From a financial perspective, \$1US goes far to create change in Africa. A Starbucks' latte can buy a textbook. One moderately priced restaurant meal can feed over one hundred children porridge for a month. With all we have, I believe that each and every one of us can make a difference. We can generously give in order to enable others to create and act on their dreams."

Although Asante Africa Foundation is her first priority, Erna remains in the corporate world part-time. Currently chief technology officer for Critical Perfusion, Inc., she also puts her leadership skills to work effectively managing a team of scientists and engineers in healthcare technology.