



## Valentine Foundation – Campaign for Leadership

### Melissa Weiler Gerber's remarks

Valentine 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration & Leadership Fund Launch  
December 3, 2005

Intuitively, we know that successful companies invest in people. Since nonprofits are being told ever so frequently that they should act like a business, surely it follows that nonprofits should invest in their people, too. Yet at budget time, when the tough decisions are being made and your hands start hurting from trying to wring out every last penny that you can, staff development frequently finds itself on the cutting room floor. It is viewed as, at best, discretionary, and, at worst luxurious or frivolous compared to putting money directly into the mission. Thus, talented people get swallowed up in day-to-day operations, are consumed by the fire drill and the predictably unpredictable nature of non-profit life. And visioning, strategic thinking, goal setting and real program assessment get pushed further, further back on the burner.

I know. I'm an Executive Director at an under funded, understaffed, always-scraping-for-the-next-dollar non-profit. I struggle with how to find, retain and reward talented staff with little to spend in salary. I must constantly adjust and adapt to an ever changing funding, economic and political landscape. And I must inspire others to believe that, person by person we can make a dent in enormous societal problems. And that makes me just like every other non-profit ED I know.

But unlike many other non-profit EDs, I have had the tremendous good fortune of receiving scholarships to participate in two amazing leadership training programs over my 6-year tenure at WOMENS WAY. At the start of my career at WOMENS WAY, I received a scholarship from the Forum of Executive Women to attend Leadership, Inc. The timing could not have been more perfect. Leadership, Inc. exposed me to new methods of self-assessment, provided an amazing overview of key public and private players in the city and allowed me to witness first hand ways to inspire a heart-felt desire to give back.

Just a few weeks ago, I graduated from the inaugural class of Bryn Mawr's Non-Profit Executive Leadership Institute as a proud Valentine Fellow. Thanks to your support, I was able to clock 120 hours of intensive professional development geared specifically toward people like me. A core component of the program was peer-to-peer learning. Right at the outset, NELI classmates established an incredible level of trust with each other, enabling us to candidly grapple with organizational and personal challenges. For non-profit EDs who often feel a bit isolated, this sense of community was comforting, liberating and secure.

As a fellow funder, I know there are about a million amazingly worthwhile ways to spend your money – if only you had the luxury of unlimited dollars to grant. Given that you do not, I cannot think of a better investment the Valentine Foundation could make than in the very people whose hearts souls, bodies and minds are what drive the advocacy for women and girls to which all of us are so committed.

Thank you.