

## What Every Long Islander Should Know: "Help Wanted"

By: Nancy Rauch Douzinas

America needs leaders. A recent poll revealed that 79% of Americans believe that without better leaders, we will decline as a nation.

On Long Island the problem is especially acute. It's not that we don't have the right people at the helm. We don't even have a helm.

Our region is so fractionated that there is no position, either in government or outside, with the authority to take the kind of action we need. This is one big reason why many people think Long Island can't get anything done.

### What are we looking for?

We asked this question to a score of Long Island leaders at a seminar last month at Planting Fields Arboretum. The event, hosted by the Rauch Foundation, brought together participants, past and present, in two leadership programs: the Institute for Not-for-Profit Management (INM) at Columbia Business School, and Energeia, the academy for regional stewardship at Molloy College.

When we asked participants to describe what kind of leadership Long Island needs, one word came up over and over. Vision.

For many, that meant thinking out-of-the-box. For others, seeing the big picture and the greater good. Still others paired visionary thinking with hard-headed practicality. Some sample comments:

- Kathryn Laible, Assistant Director of Vision Long Island, believes that a "clear vision of what's possible can transcend the self-imposed limitations of a jaded world."
- Dylan Skolnick, Associate Director of Cinema Arts Centre, called for a "combination of vision, inspiration, and implementation." He believes there are "many fine leaders on Long Island," but

they are often "too locked into their own universe."

- Michael F. Puntillo, President of Jobco Realty and Construction, also addressed the need to look beyond narrow interests. For him, leadership means "the ability to take risks. The tough-mindedness to take an unpopular position for the greater good."
- Diane Cohen, Executive Director of the Long Island Fund for Women and Girls, spoke of the need for "big-picture thinking that can promote consensus." She says we don't need one leader, but many.

Others mentioned courage and honesty, again in the context of standing for the greater good. Interestingly, no one specified any particular kind of experience. That seems to jibe with the idea that we need to go someplace new.

### Where will these leaders come from . . .

Programs like INM and Energeia offer a good start. (Disclosure: the Rauch Foundation has provided funding to both organizations.) No one imagines, of course, that leadership can be manufactured. But focusing on the goal, and bringing talented people together to search for solutions, are steps in the right direction.

### . . . and when?

Great leaders often emerge in times of crisis. Think of Lincoln and Roosevelt.

Maybe that bodes well, for surely the challenges Long Island faces are becoming critical. Housing costs, taxes, and the brain drain are threatening our region's future.

At the same time, awareness seems to be growing. Tipping points sometimes come on quite suddenly. Perhaps those reading these words include Long Island's leaders-in-waiting.

Let's hope they don't wait too long.

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