

Writing Her Story

With a career defined by powerful leadership, Annette Walker epitomizes determination, humility, and the strength of women to overcome all obstacles.



Bless the physicians, staff, and community members who helped design and support efforts to make this a place of HOPE and Healing. Protect the construction workers who will transform this steel and concrete into a place of HOPE and Healing. Hold close the patients, families and people of Orange County who will look to this place for HOPE and Healing. This is sacred ground. Annette M. Walker June 2022

If there's anything Annette Walker has learned over her years in healthcare leadership, it's how to be a good leader.

"Leadership is about stewardship of people and the organization," says Walker. "It's also about helping others realize their potential and activate their own leadership qualities."

As president of City of Hope Orange County, Walker is leading the development of a \$1 billion cancer campus of the future and network of cancer care in Orange County, the country's sixth most populous county. Bringing City of Hope's

world-renowned care to a community of 3.2 million people is clearly no small task; it requires a big vision, bravery, and strong and focused leadership.

Walker pulls from her personalized leadership style and her vast healthcare acumen, as well as her unique attributes as an accomplished woman leader. While her career demonstrates the waves effective leaders can make, Walker's passionate advocacy for women leaders—current and future—ignites her spirit.

"Throughout history, women have always demonstrated a tenacity," she explains. "When we're put under pressure, we have the opportunity to decide if it's going to beat us or transform us."



"Women have a particular talent for taking complex situations and finding a way through them, and we are naturally inclined to want to think beyond ourselves and to form strong communities. That inclination, which is a strength, extends into the workplace, our cities, and our nation. This is our time. We shouldn't be afraid to take it."

—Annette Walker, President, City of Hope Orange County

Armed with grit, resiliency, and vision, women, Walker adds, have an inborn ability to face challenges head-on and overcome them in stride. "Eleanor Roosevelt once said, 'A woman is like a teabag—you can't tell how strong it is until it's in hot water.' Sometimes we're underestimated because we might not appear outwardly strong, but we have backbones of steel," she says. "Watch out if we need to use them."

Lessons from a Pandemic

The pre-COVID-19 world saw women faced with the daily challenge of balancing work and home life. Amidst a global pandemic, where health measures have necessitated shifts in school schedules, work environments, and social interactions, women—both inside and outside of the home—have been tested physically, mentally, and emotionally.

"We are great at multitasking," Walker notes, "but this environment has tested us for a prolonged period of time and with much more complexity." In addition to maintaining a level of normalcy, women were called upon to be incredibly resilient. "We're going to be remembered as the people who not only monitored online school, but who also ran the virtual board meeting at the same time," she continues. "Having responsibilities outside of the home, in addition to making sure things don't derail inside, has been a big challenge."

Though the challenges of being a mother and teacher, wife and worker, have weighed heavily, Walker assures that the same traits inherent in women—that grit, resiliency, and vision—keep them going. "When we get knocked down, we get back up. There's a grit and passion to many women that keeps us going," she says. "We persist."

One of Walker's heroes, Joan of Arc, embodied the very characteristics Walker believes all women possess. "She was courageous," Walker says. "There are days when I don't feel confident, but then I think of Joan. She once said, 'I am not afraid. I was born to do this.' She persisted."

For those feeling anxiety from newfound responsibilities, Walker points to Joan of Arc's courage and offers some practical advice. "Focus on one day and one task at a time," she says. "When you're feeling overwhelmed, step back, take a deep breath, and focus on what's in front of you. Then go after the next thing. Soon you'll have arrived without even realizing it."

Leaving a Lasting Legacy

While the nation and world at-large are learning to live with the effects of the pandemic, Walker is confident that now is the time for women to make history.

"There are so many choices for women that were not available just 40 years ago. We still have gaps to fill, but there has been



tremendous progress. More women can start businesses on their own, develop their talents, raise families, and pursue their goals. Each generation has become more empowered," she says.

While recognizing autonomy and possessing a drive to enact change are both positive attributes that result in seismic shifts locally, nationally, and globally ("We have a gift for bringing people together to make things better," Walker asserts), there is also a need to prioritize self-care to fuel the fire that powers their strength. "Be reflective, pray, and get centered so you can be a strong person for everyone who needs you," Walker says.

Such pieces of wisdom were learned from a lifetime of successful, dedicated leadership. For Walker, the pandemic has meant more than a change in how she meets with her team. It has stirred a realization of, and appreciation for, the history people themselves make every day.

"In years to come, we will be talked about as individuals and as women—how we handled the pandemic, what happened to us, and what happened to our families," she notes. "Our stories aren't something we write when we're gone; they're stories we write every day while we're alive. What do we want those stories to say? Are we randomly going to let circumstances befall us, or are we going to help architect our stories?"

"It's an amazing time to be a woman," she continues. "Women have a particular talent for taking complex situations and finding a way through them, and we are naturally inclined to want to think beyond ourselves and to form strong communities. That inclination, which is a strength, extends into the workplace, our cities, and our nation. This is our time. We shouldn't be afraid to take it."