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If you want change, start getting political



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"We invite you to run for President. Please RSVP."

It was one of the first pithy quotes I wrote down from the weekend -- one among many clever, tongue-in-cheek, almost-plausible anecdotes about women in politics.

I spent that summer weekend in New York City attending the White House Project training session called "Vote, Run, Lead!" intended strictly for women with intentions for public office.

It was a weekend of intense training and preparation to run a successful campaign and to navigate the masculine world of politics. I attended to see what it would take and decide whether this was something I would ever pursue.

I had several questions:

Would I be able to do this with a job, a commitment to volunteerism, a doctoral class and my family?

Would it cost a lot of money?

Would it be yet another ladder I would have to scratch my way up?

And finally, do I have the mental and physical energy to do so?

Moreover, I attended because I think everyone should have something they stand for, something they will fight for, and something that they'd scream from the mountains if necessary.

Generation X, what will you stand for?

Will you stand up for victims of domestic violence or seniors who can't pay for their medication? Better yet, will you stand for quality education and universal health care? Will you argue for a reformed Social Security system or a change to gun laws?

This is our time, Gen X, so decide what you will stand for and start making changes now to solve the many challenges facing our country. We are who we are waiting for.

You see, I know what I stand for -- I'll refrain from sharing that in this article, for this is neither the time nor the place. This article is intended to share some of the answers to the questions above. Perhaps to spark interest that has been hibernating in the back of your brain since you were in high school, maybe even encourage some of you to run for office. We are who we are waiting for.

Here is what I learned.

Can you have it all? Well, as someone famous said recently, "You can have it all, but you can't have it at the same time."

I mean this only in the context that if I wanted to start a campaign to run for office today, something would have to fall off my plate -- and frankly, it wouldn't be my family.

I find it especially inspiring that Marie Wilson, founder of the White House Project and former CEO of the Ms. Foundation, had five (yes, five) children under the age of 5 when she ran for office. She just simply figured it out.

This is not to say that in the six to nine months you'll spend campaigning, your friends and family might not miss you. But it's a sprint, not a marathon. Everyone will be there to share in your success. We know that this world is about making tiny and controlled sacrifices to get ahead. What will yours be?

What will it cost? You have to look at this in two ways, both human and financial.

You'll need people and money to make a successful bid for office. What you are running for will dictate the expense and the number of people you'll surround yourself with, but suffice to say you'll

need a lot of both.

I can tell you that this training took the mystery out of that equation and I know exactly what it would take to run for an office, right down to the penny.

Will it be hard? The short answer is yes and there will be many who won't appreciate my presence, especially an incumbent.

I am a woman and I am rather young compared to those who are usually in elected and appointed seats. I also don't beat around bushes. It probably won't be a smooth sail, but I wouldn't be challenged by it if it were.

Will I do it? Well, that's for me to know and for you to find out.

Back to you, though: Given this brief sketch of what I thought was most important to figure out that weekend, will you stand up? Will you make the sacrifice and impart the change we so desperately need? Will you pave the way for those behind you?

I ask these questions of you and one last time I repeat those famous words: We are the ones we have been waiting for. That means you: Vote, Run, Lead, Generation X.

Workbytes is written locally by and for Gen Xers learning the realities of the workplace. Bettyjo H. Bouchey is provost at Mildred Elley College in Latham and is involved with a local young professionals group.