

Channeling our drive

by [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

August 28, 2014

There is a particular lecture series that I have wanted to speak at for years. And I'm embarrassed to say it—but I still get a tug of envy when I open the brochure and see who's going to be at it. I react as if it's a personal slight when I see four faces smiling at me. I used to have a feeling of jealousy a great deal when I was started out. But it's been seven years on the road now, so I don't usually harbor such aspirations any longer. I am very grateful for the opportunities I have. I relish the insightful conversations, the fascinating people, and the particular perspective that traveling gives me.

Now when I read the hash tags of conferences that I wish I were speaking at, I am thankful that I have good coffee, three meals, and the love of my family, rather than hotel dribble, protein bars, and awkward interactions with strangers.

Yet there is this one lecture.

I'm ashamed to make this confession. So let me get to the point. The four faces are the typical denominational line-up—two white men, one white woman, and a person of color (who may be a woman or a man). But I find myself focusing my resentment on the white woman. Not the *two* white guys, but the *one* white woman.

I now have an alarm that goes off in my head, like a flashing neon sign that says: **"REDIRECT! REDIRECT!"** Because as much as I'd love to hide my character defects and pretend that I'm not competitive, I am competitive. As much as I'd love to live in a world where Amazon rankings and publishing contracts don't exist, I do live in that world. And as much as I wish I could hide in a closet and write for the love of words and books, I can't afford to be a hermit.

So what's the alternative? I put my competitive energy somewhere else. I pick a guy who's farther along in his career, who is not in my corner of Christianity, and secretly jockey with him. Although some people have made careers out of criticizing

their liberal/conservative counterparts, that's not my style. I don't tell anyone but my close friends about the opposition. I nurse my feud quietly. At least until I meet the person and realize that he's human too, and then my surreptitious rivalry fizzles.

It can be bad for the sisterhood when we target our resentment amongst ourselves. And it's called the Old Boys Network for a reason. Because the Old Boys know how to work together, network their power, and add younger men into their ranks. And we should do the same. There's no way that we are going to get beyond the one-slot conference tokenism until we put some money, support, and voice around other people in the field.

So these are my rules. Of course, I'm not trying to police anyone else's speech or actions. I'm just setting out what I do.

Support other writers. Read books. Write endorsements. Write blog reviews. Write Goodreads reviews. Set up book tours. Give advice freely. Help with proposals. Make introductions to key people. Of course, there are only 24 hours in the day (sometimes I fail at doing as much as I'd like to do), but we can do as much as we can with whatever power we have.

Celebrate great art. As this week's lectionary reminds us, "Rejoice with those who rejoice." If you see someone has come out with a book, get excited about it, retweet it, post it, take a picture of the book in your hand, and create some buzz.

Never kick the lower rung. If someone who is less established in his or her career does something annoying, ignore it. As my friend [Aric Clark](#) says, "No one looks good punching down." I know that calling people out on something they say is great click-bait. Most of us have a schaudenfreude monster who needs to be fed with news of the latest misogynist's downfall. If this is what you like to do, be sure you don't do it to someone who is less accomplished than you. It's just tacky.

Play matchmaker. Almost once a week, I try to make random suggestions to conference organizers, networkers, publishers, or reporters about certain people—quick e-mails to say, "I just saw XX speak. Wow! What charisma. She's a bright rising star, for sure."

Be careful with personal attributes. When reviewing a person's work, it's good to focus on the words. The number of tattoos or children the author has really shouldn't be the main subject of a book review—unless the book is about children or

tattoos. It's good to disagree with a point of a book, that means you take the work seriously, but don't let a review be a place where you point out that you don't like that she wears high heels at the beach in her promo picture.

Feminists, be wary. While I have included people of color in this conversation, I'm not saying that feminists should be beyond critique from underrepresented racial ethnic groups. Nor am I saying that people of color should not speak out against white women. Feminists have a history of silencing our critics when we should stop, listen and learn.

If you can't say something nice . . . I got really offended by something another woman writer said and I felt like I should blog about it. I talked with [Cameron Trimble](#), and she replied, "What exactly would you get out of writing about this?" And the answer was nothing. Sometimes people on the Internet are wrong. And sometimes we can walk away instead of engaging in every struggle.

The bottom line is this—reading, writing, speaking, and ministering is never a solitary act. The Spirit of God blows *among* people. If we are engaged in these things, we can realize that we are part of a movement of love, justice and peace, and we can set aside our resentments and support one another.