

Success in Academic Surgery

Series Editors: Lillian Kao · Herbert Chen

Melina R. Kibbe

Herbert Chen *Editors*

Leadership in Surgery

 Springer

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Editors

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Chapter 1

What Is Leadership?

Meera Kotagal and Carlos A. Pellegrini

1.1 Introduction

This book is dedicated to the study of leadership and its role in the success of an academic surgeon's career. This first chapter is divided into two portions. First, we discuss leadership in general, including the definition, general aspects, and its relationship to other attributes and to the individual, including what leaders do and how they do it. Second, we review the importance of leadership and the role that it plays today in medicine and surgery.

1.2 Leadership “101”

1.2.1 *Defining Leadership*

Leadership is an *attribute* that involves a combination of a *meaningful vision* with the ability to *influence others by non-coercive means to act* in a certain way. These two components of leadership are profoundly influenced by the context of the environment, the time at which the event under discussion occurs, and the circumstances that are present. Furthermore, the leadership we will be discussing is anchored by moral values. This moral imperative differentiates human leadership

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from that of other species and plays an important role in the development of the vision. The ability to convince or influence followers by non-coercive means frequently requires the use of emotional intelligence and the establishment of a bond with the followers that is based on trust. In other species, the development of trust is profound and total and follows genetic and phenotypic expressions that make most of the participants of the group natural followers of the one that expresses the ‘alpha’ character. For example, a flock of birds or a pack of wolves self-defines with a leader at the front. Followers are convinced that the leader is aware of the location of the food, the safe environment, and the warm weather. This trust is so profound that in instances when the leader is wrong the entire group perishes.

As we move up from the animal kingdom, leadership takes on new characteristics. Indeed, leadership can be identified in almost all human endeavors. Whether in education, healthcare, industry, commerce, or finance, a person or persons emerge that are able to articulate a vision in such a way that others have a tendency to follow. However, quite differently from the animal kingdom, each of these endeavors is complex and the complexity leads to the need for different *levels of leadership*. This is an important concept because as we explore the values associated with the practice of leadership, we will be assuming that there are infinite levels of leadership. Another important difference between human leadership and that of the animal kingdom is that, as we shall see, a good part of a leader’s work is to influence, manage, and therefore “lead” those above him/her. Leadership is thus an attribute applicable as much to a president of a large corporation, a director of a unit, or a manager of a section, as it is to lower-level employees. All that is required to exercise leadership is the presence of at least two individuals and the ability of one to influence the other.

1.2.2 The Origin of Leaders

A theory espoused by T. Carlyle in 1841 “Trait Leadership” suggests that “great men born with certain personal talents, health, or physical characteristics have the capacity to affect change” and become leaders [1]. For some time it was believed therefore that leadership was God given – a part of the genetic make-up. In 1884 Herbert Spencer challenged that concept and described the “situational” theory of leadership which suggested that leaders rise to the circumstances [2]. Spencer proposed that the dominant feature in leadership is the environment, represented by challenges, and that it is those challenges that allow leaders to emerge. These two theories are not necessarily contradictory as it is possible that when the appropriate environmental challenges occur, the individuals likely to emerge are those with a genetic predisposition to do so. However, we know of individuals who throughout their lives did not manifest the traits associated with leadership, and who were more predisposed to be followers, and yet when faced with extraordinary circumstances became strong leaders. There is another theory which suggests that personal will and inspiration can give rise to the appropriate vision, which when expressed in

Table 1.1 Leadership and values

Integrity	Trust
Humility	Confidence
Kindness	Model
Support	Ethical
Fairness	Skill
Authenticity	Moral courage
Flexibility	Responsibility
Discipline	Inspire
Honesty	Purpose
Energy	

Table 1.2 How leaders inspire people

*Qualitative study of several thousand business and government executives [18]
 “What values do you look for and admire in your superiors?”*

Honest	88 %
Forward looking	75 %
Inspiring	68 %
Competent	63 %
Fair	49 %
Supportive	41 %

certain ways, inspires others to follow. Deepak Chopra in his book “The Soul of Leadership” describes how one can “look into one’s self and lead from the soul’s unlimited wisdom” [3]. This is the so-called “look and listen” theory in which the individual looks into his/her soul and reflects in order to create the appropriate vision. This theory suggests that most human beings with the ability to read their own feelings, to “look” into their soul, can derive a vision that expresses the moral values of the individual to a greater extent than those generated by other means or coming from circumstances outside the person. These theories, as well as others that have tried to explain leadership, strongly support our belief that leadership skills can be learned and can therefore be practiced in all environments at all levels. It also supports the theory that in the exercise of leadership a person brings her or his own set of values and style and therefore to some extent leadership is “personal.” Table 1.1 shows some of the values associated with leadership. Several studies have looked at how followers grade each one of these personal values in terms of their respect and trust towards their leaders. Table 1.2 shows a representative value scale on the views of followers towards values expressed by leaders.

Kail identified six leadership characteristics that define modern leaders: courage, integrity, humility, selflessness, empathy and collaboration [4]. He believes these elements provide the platform for character and that it is character – not accomplishment – which defines a modern leader. Interestingly – especially given the military background of the author – he impresses upon us that *courage* is related to attachment to moral principles rather than to the capacity to absorb risk in dangerous

situations. He defines *integrity* as the most critical attribute that builds trust and connects leader to follower. He believes *humility* promotes traits which emphasize respect, loyalty and trust, vital elements in a modern team environment. *Selflessness* is based on serving others and developing the followers to their full capacity, and it allows the leader to focus on the mission and those who can accomplish it. Selflessness allows the leader to exercise authority on behalf of the needs and goals of the team, rather than his/her own needs. Finally, *empathy* is the ability to relate to another's needs, to understand his/her ways of thinking and feeling, and to serve by imagining ourselves in their shoes. It is an important "connector" between leaders and followers.

1.2.3 Emotional Intelligence and Leadership

Emotional intelligence has been defined as a "personal attribute that facilitates social and professional relationships" by Goleman [5]. As was the case with leadership, some have thought that emotional intelligence is something that one is born with. It is now clear that this is something that, to some extent, can be learned and practiced by everyone willing to do so, although it may come more easily to one individual than another. According to Goleman and Mayer there are five stages in the development of emotional intelligence, each representing a step higher in the process:

Stage 1 – Self-Awareness: Knowledge of self implies the development of an ability to determine how we each react emotionally to the circumstances of life, work, pleasure, etc. It is the identification of "the things that make us tick."

Stage 2 – Self-Regulation: Self-regulation refers to the development of the capacity to regulate the expression of emotion. In other words, once we have learned what generates an emotional response in ourselves, this second stage focuses on the ability to regulate that expression so that it is at least not evident (and can cause distress) to others.

Stage 3 – Motivation: Motivation is the capacity to regulate the generation of the emotion itself and, once we have identified what causes these emotions to occur, to be able to develop internal methods that allow us to modulate that emotion. The ideal is to reach a level when we do not have to modulate the expression but we simply feel less emotional stress.

Stage 4 – Empathy: Empathy relates to the ability to detect what others think and feel; once the individual is able to know him or herself and regulate both the generation and the expression of most emotions, the individual needs to be able to detect what others think or feel in order to exercise leadership. This is a key component of the bridge between the leader and the follower.

Stage 5 – Social Skill: This stage focuses on the ability to influence the feelings of others. Now that we know what others are thinking or feeling at a given time under a certain set of circumstances, our ability to influence those feelings

determines to some extent the success of the leader. Thus one can think of leadership as an activity motivating people to do something because they want to or believe in it. This is the ultimate exercise of leadership: influencing others to the extent they are convinced that a certain thing must be done or a specific action should be taken (and can exercise their own influence on peers and other followers as well).

1.2.4 What Do Leaders Do?

Leaders exercise leadership by creating a vision, articulating a purpose, generating and sustaining trust, and motivating individuals to take action.

1. **Creating the vision** – The creation of a successful vision must be associated with meaning and significance; it must be anchored in the leader’s values and guided by his or her moral compass. When developing the vision, leaders must use their imagination; they must question all aspects of an issue. For example, the fact that something is working well does not mean it will work well forever, and in fact even if it works well now, one may be able to improve it. In other words, leaders need to “free” their imagination to be able to create a new environment, system, device – they must be bold. For example, Colin Powell said, “You don’t know what you can get away with until you try” [6]. He encourages us to follow the principle of “it is easier to get forgiveness than permission” and tells us that “good leaders don’t wait for official blessing to try things out. Indeed, if one asks enough people for permission one will inevitably come up against someone who believes his or her job is to say ‘no’” [6]. It is also important during the development of the vision to be able to gauge and understand the needs of the followers. While vision may sometimes, by its very nature, ignore some of the immediate gratification of the followers, it is important to always look for ways to relate the benefits of the mission to the followers. The mission is then much more likely to succeed.
2. **Articulating the purpose** – Once the vision has been created, the leader must be able to articulate and to “sell” the purpose to the followers. The key to that effort is the way in which the purpose is expressed coupled with the determination to achieve the goals. It is important that one offers strong points of view that focus everyone on the shared vision, delivers clear expectations to the followers, and demonstrates the need to act with determination to achieve. In the words of Colin Powell, “Perpetual optimism is a force multiplier” [7]. The ripple effect of a leader’s positive words inspires an optimistic response; in the same way, cynicism and pessimism engender a parallel negative response. Leaders who whine and blame engender those same behaviors among their colleagues. In expressing the purpose a leader should do it in a fashion that conveys, “we can change things here, we can achieve awesome goals, we can be the best.”