

Vision, Strategy and Motivation:
How to get others to follow your lead

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SAAAPM April 2017

Congratulations! You're the Chair! Maybe this is a position you've always wanted or perhaps this is a position you've never imagined for yourself. Nonetheless, here you are: Chair, CEO of a medium sized company with millions in revenues and dozens of employees. Your Dean looks to you to articulate the departmental vision and come up with a strategy to get there. What is implied is that you will motivate your people to higher levels of performance, greater efficiencies, better care, greater access, 24-7-365 seamless coverage, while contributing to the education and research mission *and all under budget and in the black*. Problem is leading people is difficult even under ideal conditions and we all know that health care in 2017 is far from perfect. Leadership is about getting results. That's why you were hired and if you can't deliver, the bitter truth is that you will be replaced. So how do you get your people to follow you when the problems are so complex, the path so uncertain and the future so unsure?

Vision

I'm betting your hospital or medical school has a Vision, Values and Mission statement. Find it. You can adapt the System Vision to your department easily. Similarly, it is generally easy to imagine any number of "vision" statements to include being "the preferred" medical location delivering "the best care" that's "affordable, accessible and outcome driven." Unfortunately, it is remarkably easy to create an empty slogan with which all can agree but lacks true buy in. What is imperative as a departmental leader is that you must provide a compelling vision of the future that aspirational, attainable and professionally motivating *for each person in your department*. Your people must feel like they are a part of something bigger than themselves, an organization in which they can be a proud member and one in which they can achieve milestones of professional growth. Without these elements, no cliché vision statement will ever work. Your vision must provide a realistic pathway to get your people where they dream they can be.

Strategy

We all know you eat an elephant one bite at a time. Managing your department is no different. Casting a compelling vision of the future in the absence of a realistic strategy (pathway) to achieve this vision is an empty exercise. Nothing will happen and your faculty will soon see the futility of following you and the hollowness of their

efforts. Simply stated, they'll check out physically or mentally: no vision, no strategy; no people, no department. Easy.

When discussing strategy, I always try to frame any proposition using SMART goals. SMART goals can be applied to an individual, a division or the entire department. A SMART goal is:

SPECIFIC – The objective is clearly defined in as precise a way as possible. For example, stating that I want to lose weight might be specific, but stating that I want to lose 5-pounds is better. Be specific.

MEASUREABLE – If you can't measure it, you can't change it or manage it. If implementing your vision cannot be quantified in measureable units, change the goals!

ATTAINABLE – If you really want to fail at something, set a vision that is unattainable. For example, an institution with no history nor current NIH funding is unlikely to be “#1 in research” anytime soon.

RELEVANT – Is the goal relevant to your overall objective? Is it consistent with your vision? You'd be surprised at the number of activities we all engage in that simply are irrelevant! Or, maybe not....

TIME BOUND – This is the one most leaders over look at their own peril. Everything you do should have a time stamp associated with it so that you can MEASURE progress and post RESULTS.

Motivation

General Eisenhower once said “Leadership means getting people to do what you want done because they want to do it.” Do your people follow you? Are they motivated to follow your stated vision and employ your (SMART) strategy? How do you know and more importantly, what can you do if you suspect not? Fortunately, leadership (and motivation) is a skill like any other than can be learned and practiced. Naturally gifted leaders can lose their people, and the most unlikely among us can generate almost mystical loyalty. How in the world does this happen?

In my 25 years in academic medicine and in my eleven years as a Chair, I've seen the full range of leaders from the truly exceptional to those who flame out soon after a heralded appointment. You have, too. In nearly every case, success or failure are unrelated to knowledge and almost entirely dependent on the leader's interpersonal skills and ability to cultivate relationships, establish trust and communicate clearly with others. You were selected for Chair based on your past accomplishments, but as the best-selling book by Marshall Goldsmith states, *what got you here won't get you there*. So, what can you do to enhance your opportunity for success as a Chair? How can you motivate others follow?

Ten Tips to Motivate Others

- 1) **Attitude is everything.** I've heard it said that “We can teach you our product but we can't teach you *Attitude*.” This is universally true, and the attitude you

bring to work each day will define the relationships you develop and the interactions you have as a leader. You know this is true. You've seen it, right? You don't want to be around someone with a bad attitude any more than the next person, but have you thought about how you are projecting *your* attitude? Leadership can be surprisingly physically challenging and certainly emotionally draining. Get ready for it, and remember that despite all the demands placed on you, the one thing you own, and you own alone, is your attitude. Bring a good one to work and you will find people anxious and willing to help you and follow you. Adopt a bad attitude and you will find yourself charging up the hill alone.

- 2) **Use your Body.** Here's a staggering fact: 60% of your communicated message comes from your body language. Thirty percent from your facial expressions and only 10% of your intended message are the actual words coming out of your mouth! Think about that. In thinking about those around you whom you admire, respect and look up to, how do they communicate? Is it that their words are so thoughtful and motivating, or is there more? Of course, there is more. To motivate others, you need to communicate a leader's message that engenders *trust*. Dress right. Stand tall. Be aware of your body language. Practice active listening with an attentive facial expression, and (least of all!) choose the right words when trying to communicate a motivating message.
- 3) **Earn your keep.** Remember this: There are no special deals for the Chair. Sure, your job is distinctly different from everyone else in the department and you need time to attend meetings, prepare budgets, tackle HR disputes and the like. But what you are not entitled to is a different set of rules. Different job, different job description? Sure. Special rules for you? No way. You should go where assigned on your clinical days, put in vacation like everyone else, and pull your share of unpleasant assignments. If people perceive that you are cut a special deal, they will resent your position. If your people see you pulling your fair share, going the extra mile, they will respect you. There's a reason why great Generals ensure their troops eat before they do. Learn this lesson.
- 4) **Don't criticize, condemn or complain.** This goes hand in hand with #3 above. If you want to be an effective leader that others will follow, you need people on your side because *they choose to be on your side*. Fear and intimidation have limited roles in leadership, but far and away, influence (leadership) stems from respect, trust and likability. I've said to others, "I'm not your friend; I'm your Boss." But that doesn't mean that I am not friendly, approachable, fair and open minded, empathetic, sincere and authentic. A successful leader truly cares about their people. These qualities must be genuine. You can't fake empathy, for example. One sure way to lose your people is to criticize, condemn or complain. These are the opposite qualities of empathy, respect and caring.
- 5) **Embrace the rule of 85/15.** Your professional success rests on the rule of 85/15. This rule asserts that 15% of your professional success depends on your factual knowledge and a shocking 85% of your success depends on the relationships you build with others. Think about it – you didn't get to your leadership position by being dumb! But your technical skills do not translate

into people following you. How many professional and collegiate coaches get fired every year because their teams can't win? Are the teams failing because the coach doesn't know their X's and O's? Of course not. They fail because the chemistry required to win is not there. At this stage of your career, it is less about knowledge (knowledge is assumed) and more about building teams, motivating others and developing meaningful winning relationships. The good news is that anyone can learn the skills of relationship building. This is a skill like any other and it can be learned, so...

- 6) **Read something!** If you believe in the rule of 85/15 and you concede that nurturing relationships is a skill like any other, why wouldn't you study some tried and true techniques? There are many great books on the market but to me, one stands out above all the rest: *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie published in 1936. Get it, read it, and learn from it. You can thank me later. Motivational leaders study the art of leadership. Make it a habit to read 4 books a year (one a quarter) on self-improvement and leadership. Realize as you do this that 2/3 of any given book will fall flat for you, but 1/3 will speak to you. And, this 1/3 will change from year to year as your challenges and life journey unfolds. Keep reading.
- 7) **Learn to Deal with Conflict.** Leadership is conflict. The sooner you learn the techniques of effective conflict resolution, the better. For a simple starter, I suggest *What to do when conflict happens* by Eric Harvey and Steve Ventura found at *Walkthetalk.com*. This book is quick, easy and it will help you. Learning how to deal with conflict constructively and you will be light years ahead in this game (and mentally healthier, too!). As the boss, you must be impartial, open-minded and a stickler for policy. Don't play favorites. Listen before acting. Don't avoid conflict, it won't go away by itself. Your people will respect you for being fair and firm.
- 8) **Don't take it personally.** Criticism is your new travel mate. You will be challenged, judged, unfairly misquoted and harshly held to an impossible standard of perfection. Unfair? You bet. Roll with it. The reality is that you have chosen a leadership position and this comes with the territory. You are working in the kitchen and it gets hot. So, learn from your mistakes and take criticisms constructively. Don't get down on yourself when things go poorly. If knocked down, pick yourself up, dust off, *learn something*, and move on.
- 9) **Put others first.** Transition to senior leadership is a huge step. Success isn't about you any longer; it is about how well your team performs. How well are your people doing? Do your faculty have the resources they need for success? Are they moving forward on the promotion ladder? Are your faculty receiving academic recognition in their specialty? How about in the hospital by the hospital president? How about by the surgeons? Failed leaders struggle in this last transition. Peter Drucker, a famous business thinker said, "Rank does not confer privilege or give power. It imposes responsibility." This new authority comes with a new set of responsibilities and the shocking secret is that most of the people around you want you to succeed in your position. Those around you are pulling for you. They want you to take the reins of this

new responsibility and lead. Leaders don't have all the answers, but they bring out the best in their teams for optimal success. Leaders put others first.

- 10) **Don't lose yourself.** I am continually amazed at the increasing pace and demands placed on all of us. The emails never stop, meetings swallow your free time, HR issues explode like IEDs. Each day you will leave work with a list of tasks left incomplete. The work demands are substantial and the emotional toll can be every bit as challenging. I've learned that one can literally work 20 hours a day *and will still be behind*. As crazy as that sounds, it's true. As a leader, you are running up the side a muddy hill, and as soon as you reach the top, all you see is the next hill yet to climb. To lead others, you must find a way to compartmentalize this work environment. Learn to decompress. Exercise. Eat healthfully. Engage with others outside of work. Play when you can. And always, cherish the ones you love and love you.

In thinking about how to motivate people to follow you as a leader, there are so many tips and tricks in addition to those principles listed above that this small essay can do no justice to the subject. In the edits for this submission I left out the power of delegation, the value of silence, the evils of hubris, and so many more. The one reality is that regardless of your natural leadership qualities, you will truly only be highly successful as a leader if you apply the techniques of leadership that motivate others to do what you want done because they want to do it. As a leader, you can make a real difference.

I know you can. I hope you will.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Zwart". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "P" and "Z".