

Address to the Hanley Health Leadership Development Graduation Salute to the 2014-2015 Class

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April 17, 2015

Thanks to Judianne Smith, Kathy Vezina and the Hanley staff. MeHAF has had a long relationship with Hanley and I'm honored to have been asked to speak with all of you for today's important celebration.

It's a bit daunting to speak to a group of people who are not only just completing a leadership development program, but who, in fact, all came into this program as leaders already. Many of you I know well, others I hope to know better in the future, and this makes my job even harder. As I thought about what to say, I realized the best thing to do would be to share some of my own experiences and reflections and hope that some of them might resonate with you.

While I didn't participate in the Hanley HLD program, I have participated in leadership development programs in the past and share with all of you the experience of considering my own approach to work and leadership within the context of the leadership framework put forth by James Kouzes and Barry Posner in The Leadership Challenge. They posit that leaders, at their best, exhibit five exemplary practices:

- Challenge the Process
- Inspire a Shared Vision
- Enable Others to Act
- Model the Way
- Encourage the Heart

These are important practices. As I have moved through my career, I have gained a deeper appreciation of them. I'll touch back on one of the practices a little later in my comments.

But first I'm going to share with you my own, non-scientifically developed, from the trenches, view of the practices that *I* use to try to be the best leader I can be and how I try to foster leadership in others.

You'll see an invitation at your place. On it, I've shared *Leonard's Five Leadership Practices*:

- Apply the leadership skills you have honed and acquired
- Commit to seeking and making balance in your own lives
- Develop trust in the skills and capacities of those who work for you and with you and those who are your leaders
- Find a mentor and mentor others
- Take the long view

So what do I mean by each of these?

Apply the leadership skills you've honed and acquired. As I mentioned before, you all came into this program with leadership skills that you developed through your previous life experiences. As a colleague said to me earlier today when we were talking about my talk tonight, "Leadership programs are a little like the Wizard of Oz. Dorothy went around looking for help to go home, and she herself had all the knowledge and power she needed the whole time." As a leader, you

continuously hone the skills you have, refining them as you expand your experiences. And you do acquire new skills. You fit these in with those that you already have and keep building your capacity. But it's usually a slow and sometimes not immediately evident process. There really aren't too many times when you have a Cinderella meets the fairy godmother experience where someone waves a wand and "Bibbity, Bobbity, Boo," you miraculously look, act, feel, and behave differently as a leader. Yet, from time to time you have the opportunity to think about how you handled a situation and then look back to how you might have approached it in the past, and find that you've applied your new skills and your constantly burnished long-term talents to frankly do a better job than you would have before.

Commit to seeking and making balance in your own lives. About 10 – 15 years ago I was at a point in my life and my career where I simply couldn't fathom how I would keep working for another several decades. I was tired and stressed. I didn't feel like I was adding value for the people who reported to me. And I thought by just trying harder and accomplishing more, I'd get to the top of the mountain of work and everything would be better. I was lucky enough at the time to have a friend encourage me to speak with an executive coach. The single best – and probably the corniest – thing he told me was to "put on my own oxygen mask before helping others." It seemed so trite. But for me, it was an important lesson that I hearken back to again and again. In order to be the best leader – and to do your best for the people around you, you have to have the strength – the energy and the oxygen – to be able to do it. Figure out what creates balance in your life and seek it. I garden and I sing with a choral group. Sometimes making time for these activities is tough, but I have learned that without these outlets, I can't be a strong support for those I work with.

Develop and trust in the skills and capacities of those who work for you and with you and those who are your leaders. The most effective organizations that I have worked in have consciously made efforts to support the capacities and contributions of every member of the team. The Maine Health Access Foundation, where I work now, strives hard to do this. We try to work together in a way that recognizes that different team members have different talents and that leadership comes from all levels of the organization. Many of you have met Wendy Wolf, our dynamic CEO. She is an incredible thinker, speaker, writer, and representative of our organization. Yet, she knows that our Grants Manager, Cathy Luce, is the expert on many of the federal compliance requirements that we must meet as a private foundation and relies greatly on Cathy's expertise. And Morgan Hynd, a previous HLD graduate and program officer at MeHAF is the best editor in the office. Wendy often has Morgan edit her documents, as do I. I know that I often tend to be the person in the office who thinks about unintended consequences. This balances well with others who are more likely to leap quickly into new activities. And likewise the team members who "leap" help me move more quickly into areas that are very important for us to work on. By learning the skills and capacities of others and trusting in them, we can accomplish much more.

Find a mentor and mentor others. One of my favorite roles is serving as a mentor because I learn so much from the people who are in theory the ones being mentored. It is an honor to be a mentor. And I feel it is a duty as well. Only by helping the next group of leaders can we ensure that the work we care about now will be continued into the future. And let me list some of the qualities of my mentors, whose value only keep deepening like fine wine: my first boss after college who encouraged the heart by hosting regular potlucks in our research lab;

my next boss whose motto was “no surprises” which fostered an open dialogue in our department about what was – and wasn’t going so well; two dear colleagues and friends who worked as consultants with me years ago who asked incredibly pointed questions about every assumption and plan and by doing so, always sharpened our work; a former boss who could think so clearly and carefully about how information would best be understood by others, and therefore could help define common ground for political and philosophical opponents. My leadership capacities have been strengthened by all of them.

Take the long view. As leaders in the health sector, we’re working on big, complicated issues. We may not see success right away. As one of my MeHAF colleagues said in a blog last fall about “urgent patience and patient urgency”:

We have traditionally measured success through work and activities that are easy to count. This might be appropriate for technical problems, but they’re not well-suited to the complex issues that sit at the intersection of many systems, such as health. . . We know that change moves at the speed of trust, yet we act differently when the bell rings. We want to get straight to the action – to the deliverables. We let urgent action and our drive for results trump the need for patient attention to the relational and process components so critical to systems change. . . It requires a level of urgent patience that makes time and space for the relational and process elements of our work and the influential roles they play in supporting systems change.

Our role as leaders is to ensure that we look into the future to see where we want to go and then to help everyone on the team to have the patience – and the urgency – to make sure that we get there together.

I promised I would circle back to the Kouzes and Posner Leadership Practices. One of the practices that I didn’t score so well on when I did the Leadership Practices Inventory a number of years ago was *Encouraging the Heart*. I

remember thinking that it seemed a bit too touchy-feely and I didn't see how this practice could possibly fit into how I needed to be as my "work self." But I decided to work on the practice and set about figuring out ways to improve my skills. Over the years, I've learned that at times encouraging the heart is the most important leadership practice of all, and I'm beginning to think that it needs to be the foundation that undergirds all of the other practices.

About two years ago I ran across a quote attributed to the Talmud that I cut out and taped to my wall. It captures quite a lot of how I think about leadership and my own role as a leader. And it is an example of my own efforts to better practice encouraging the heart.

Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly, now.

Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. It is not for you to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.

As leaders, and especially leaders in health and health care, we work in a field that touches people at their most human and vulnerable times. It's also a field where change is slow and systems are complicated. No one person can "complete the work." Yet neither is any one of us, as an individual, as a leader, as a mentor, as a colleague, free to "abandon it." We must encourage the heart for ourselves and for others. It is only by doing so that we will have the compassion and strength to do our best work in ways that honor and value those whose health we try to improve.

In closing, as you step back into your roles at work and at home and in your communities after this graduation celebration, I hope you will:

- Apply your leadership skills
- Commit to balance in your lives

- Develop and trust in the skills of those around you
- Find a mentor and be a mentor
- Take the long view

In my experience, being a leader is all about the people that surround you. Yes, we have to do our own patient and largely invisible work on developing our internal strengths. But it's the people around us who really shape and support our leadership. And we must encourage our own hearts and the hearts of those around us.

The cards at your places are an invitation. It is in part an invitation from me, but it is mostly an invitation to turn to your classmates and respond to **them** to indicate your own willingness to continue to hone your leadership practices and just as importantly, to support them as they do the same.

I wish each of you – and all of you – success as leaders now and in the future, from the bottom of my heart!