

BOOK REVIEW

On Leadership: Essential Principles for Success

By Donald J. Palmisano, MD

Skyhorse Publishing, New York, NY

www.skyhorsepublishing.com

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ISBN 978-1-60239-321 (alk. paper)

Homework, Courage, Persistence

ONE steamy New Orleans' evening, a man held hostages at gunpoint. A policeman realizing the explosive and critical nature of the situation, made a decision. He dropped his weapon, raised his hands over his head and went inside. The man then pointed his gun at the police officer and said, "Now I'm going to kill you." With complete calm, the officer slowly placed his hand on the hostage taker's forehead and said, "You have a fever, let me take you to the hospital." After this simple, brave act of concern, the hostage taker dropped his weapon and the officer, true to his word, personally took the man to the hospital. That officer was Dr. Palmisano's father.

Donald Palmisano, past president of the AMA, uses this example of courage to define leadership: what it is, what are its characteristics, what it takes to be a leader. Dr. Palmisano's father taught his son to "do your homework (be prepared), be brave and never give up," three defining cardinal features of leadership. Succeeding chapters of the book explain what leadership is with examples and lessons to be learned from how heroic men and women faced critical situations and what they did, for better or worse.

Why look at leadership now? In the Forward, Bobby Jindal, Governor of Louisiana points out, "As we know all too well in my home state of Louisiana, strong leadership, or lack thereof, can effect thousands of lives.... At a time [hurricane Katrina] when leadership was needed most, so many failed to step up to the cause."^{ix} These are critical, rapidly changing times when physicians especially need the skills to be leaders in the health-care arena.

Dr. Palmisano incorporates brief stories of heroic leadership to illustrate what leaders requires in times of critical change. The stories date from 2,500 years ago with quotations from Sun Tzu to the present with the successes and failures of officials and volunteers during hurricane Katrina. There are fascinating stories of Congressional Medal of Honor winners, stories of ordinary

people who do extra-ordinary acts of leadership and heroism, and stories of failure to lead, and poor leadership. All have lessons to teach us.

Palmisano points out that indecision and delay beget failure. Often indecision comes from fear. This leads to what General Patton called "ready-aim-aim-aim-aim syndrome." You must be ready to fire.^{p1} Be prepared, do your homework and then do the best you can, but do it. As President Theodore Roosevelt once said, "In any moment of decision the best thing you can do is the right thing, the next best thing is the wrong thing, and the worst thing you can do is nothing."^{p76}

If you are going to be a successful leader, you need to do your homework. Be prepared. If decisions are to be made at a large meeting, know parliamentary procedure so you won't be outwitted. Know all the pros and cons of the argument. Use laptops, iPods and iPhones to have the necessary information immediately at hand. Above all be able to communicate. Know how to speak in public, give a speech, be interviewed by the media. Be firm, be polite, but never give up your principles. Palmisano gives excellent examples to illustrate the importance of all these needed techniques to get your point across and lead the way in our new, changing world of healthcare.

Lessons learned from the examples of successful and unsuccessful leadership are included after each chapter and are excellent, and well worth reading and re-reading. Perhaps equally important is knowing what leadership is and then evaluating political candidates for office. Ask them what they have done that is heroic, review what they have done yourself: does it fit into the category of good leadership? Another important point is self-examination. How can someone become a leader? Or become a better leader? This book is an excellent primer on leadership. Its style is fluid, the examples are interesting and the lessons learned are well-illustrated.

With the recent passage of the Affordable Care Act and its constitutionality being upheld by the Supreme Court, it is critical that physicians develop leadership skills. Physicians are needed to lead large clinical groups, to represent the interest of physicians to legislators and policy makers and to lead physicians themselves with strength, courage and ability in the changing world of health-care delivery. Where to start? Read this book. Be a leader.

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