

Why Lead?

In Part One of this two-part series, Dr. Joel C. Small discussed the transformational nature of leadership in dentists' professional lives. In Part Two, he discusses how leadership qualities can enhance their personal lives.

Leadership creates harmony between our personal and professional lives

Bill George, in his bestselling book *True North*, describes a process that he calls "integration." This is the process through which one discovers his/her authentic self and masters the art of being that same authentic self in each aspect of his/her life—work, family, friends, and community.

Value-based leaders are the masters of integration. There is no duplicity in their lives. They are effective leaders because of their authenticity, and they are the same authentic person in their private as well as their professional lives. They define their goals based on the universal nature of their values and purpose, whereby achieving a goal in one aspect of their life enhances and benefits all aspects of their life.

The concept of authenticity has roots based in social psychology. In the mid 1950s, Leon Festinger, a noted American psychologist, presented his theory of cognitive dissonance. This theory suggests that psychological stress is created when there is a difference between our ideal selves and our real selves. Accordingly, the greater the separation between the ideal and the real, the greater the degree of discord or dissonance. Someone who exhibits true authenticity would theoretically experience no discord because their real and ideal self would be the same in all aspects of their life.

The secret to achieving integration is to define with crystal-like clarity who and what we want to be, and making

this vision the anchor for all that we do. This is not as simple as it may sound, but the effort is greatly rewarded. Achieving authenticity brings harmony to our lives by allowing us to be who we have chosen to be in any environment. Along with this harmony comes the greatest reward of all—a profound sense of peace.

Leadership brings clarity to our life

Clarity is an important piece of the leadership puzzle. Many of the great minds in the field of leadership consider the ability to provide organizational clarity to be the essential purpose of leadership.

Core ideology is the catalyst for clarity. Core values and purpose, when viewed as the organization's foundation, or anchor, are perpetual reference points that serve as a guide and catalyst for effective and efficient decision making.

If we are an authentic value-based leader, we maintain the same anchor and are benefitted by the same clarity in all aspects of our life. Foremost among the personal benefits of clarity is our enhanced ability to make difficult decisions. Clarity of purpose allows us to maintain a laserlike focus on what is important. There is a clearly defined path to our goal, and with an absence of uncertainty, we are able to quickly identify false paths or detours that drain our energy. The end result is that we are able to make effective decisions more efficiently while preserving our energy and avoiding the frustration of distractions.

Leadership defines purpose

There is no one who understands the significance of purpose better than a true leader. The process of becoming a leader requires a deep understanding and alignment with purpose, and one's purpose in life is the answer to "why" one exists. A true leader derives his or her ability to lead from a strong base forged from a profound understanding and commitment to purpose, and the exercise of developing this base has long been considered a rite of passage to leadership.

Purpose makes a profound difference in our lives because it creates focus and

instills motivation. These two ingredients, focus and motivation, are the keys to making things happen. Focus enables us to concentrate on what is important, or essential, to achieving our purpose or goal. Motivation is the mental state that compels us to act or move toward a desired purpose or goal. Ultimately, it is our focus and motivation that enables us to work efficiently and effectively.

Having a common purpose in our personal and professional lives allows us as leaders to communicate and instill a sense of this purpose in our followers. This basic principle of leadership is not situational, nor is it specific to certain types of leadership. Whether we are a great military leader going to battle or an organizational leader going to a board meeting, our success is directly related to our ability to communicate a collectively shared purpose to our followers. If you look deep enough, you will likely find that at the core of every great organization is a leader who has the ability to move people toward a common goal by clearly defining their collective organizational purpose.

There is a wonderful story about the Manhattan Project that I believe illustrates this point quite dramatically. The story is told by Richard Feynman, the eccentric and brilliant Nobel Prize-winning physicist who, along with Robert Oppenheimer, a brilliant physicist as well, helped coordinate and manage the Manhattan Project. In order to fully appreciate the context and the unique historical perspective of this project, a brief history lesson is required. The time is 1942; we are at war with Germany. It has come to the attention of several key people, including Albert Einstein, that the Germans are working feverishly to develop an atomic bomb. Einstein, in 1939, had written to then President Franklin Roosevelt to inform him of Germany's intentions to create a weapon of mass destruction. Subsequent letters from Einstein ensued, informing the president of the urgency of the situation. In 1942, it became apparent that America may be losing the nuclear race with Germany. All agreed that this was a race America could not afford to lose



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and, in 1942, the Manhattan Project was born. The site chosen for the project was Los Alamos, a small, secluded town in northern New Mexico.

What followed was a massive collaboration between the United States military and our nation's scientific community. The foremost American scientists and engineers of the time were summoned to Los Alamos under a veil of secrecy that many historians would describe as unprecedented. Entire families, uprooted from their homes and extracted from their communities, were relocated to a crude, military-style compound in this secluded part of New Mexico.

Shortly after their arrival, the work at hand was begun. Teams of scientists and engineers were assigned the task of solving equations and creating scientific formulas that would ultimately enable us to unleash the power of the atom. The work was tedious, and the days were long. The military, ever vigilant about maintaining the veil of secrecy, would not allow Oppenheimer to inform the teams about the nature and ultimate goal of the project. They were simply given their tasks with no explanation of their significance. According to Feynman, who was in charge of supervising the teams, chaos ensued. The work progressed slowly, and the quality of the work was substandard, considering the unique qualifications of the assembled talent.

Realizing that something had to be done, Feynman approached his superiors and requested that the recruits be given full disclosure of the project's purpose. Eventually, the superiors acquiesced, and Oppenheimer gathered the recruits together and delivered a speech that fully addressed the nature of the Manhattan Project and the team's contribution to its success. Following their meeting with Oppenheimer, the environment was profoundly altered. Feynman described the change as nothing less than a "total transformation." Oppenheimer had opened the floodgates by simply answering the question "Why?" From that point forward, their efforts had purpose, and the culture of the Manhattan Project was immutably changed. The quality of work improved exponentially, and the deadlines were met with time to spare. Teams became self-motivated, requiring little supervision, and they worked tirelessly around the clock. The rest, as they say, is history.

Finally, it is imperative that leaders understand their essential role in defining purpose for themselves and their organization. On one hand, we can motivate individuals by creating a "command-and-control" culture that demands compliance to rules and regulations, and fosters no well-defined sense of purpose. On the other hand, we can create a culture that does not simply motivate, but rather *instills* motivation, by answering the question "Why?" and clearly defining the collective purpose of the organization.

Leadership teaches the art of authentic expression

If I were to choose the most distinguishing characteristic of value-based leaders, it would have to be, without question, their ability to express themselves authentically. The authentic expression of self is at the heart of leadership because it engenders two of the essential prerequisites of leadership: trust and credibility.

It is my personal belief that authentic communication has a self-evident quality that somehow disarms our natural defense mechanisms and allows us to communicate at a much deeper level of meaning. It is as if we are being approached by someone who has laid down their sword and shield and says "I come in peace," and it is their very willingness to be vulnerable that triggers our willingness to respond in kind. Communicating on this level frees us from the concerns of hidden agendas and duplicitous intent, which detract from our ability to hear the intended message.

Stephen M. R. Covey, in his excellent book, *The Speed of Trust*, writes about the negotiations that led to the merger of their family business with the Franklin Quest Corporation to form the FranklinCovey Company. Stephen, the son of the noted author, Stephen R. Covey, represented the family business in the negotiations that eventually led to the merger. At one point, the negotiations became quite contentious. The reality of a future merger looked bleak. Stephen openly admits that he made significant mistakes with regard to his handling of the negotiations. The most critical mistake, according to him, was assuming that his reputation alone would be sufficient to create trust between the two merging entities. This assumption, in fact, was not true, and concerns about trust, hidden agendas, and the overall unfairness of the

negotiations were prevalent throughout their numerous meetings.

At the low point in their negotiations, Stephen was scheduled to facilitate a pivotal meeting in Washington, DC, between the key decision makers for both sides. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the strategy issues relating to the merger. Realizing that the merger was doomed to failure without a foundation of trust between the parties, Stephen threw out the meeting agenda, and instead decided to address all of the underlying, unspoken issues that no one had previously been willing to address. The meeting, which was scheduled for 2 hours, became an all day event. Stephen openly addressed the lack of trust between the two parties, and how it had led to misinterpretation of each party's intentions. By the end of the day, a new sense of trust was created that allowed the negotiations to move forward in a positive, cooperative direction. It was this act of transparency and vulnerability that ultimately changed the course of their negotiations and led to the successful culmination of the business merger.

Mastering the art of communicating authentically has significant implications in our personal lives as well. For some, it has helped repair and redefine their relationship with their families and friends. For others, it has improved the overall quality of their lives by enhancing their ability to communicate at a deeper and more meaningful level. At a minimum, authentic communication helps us create harmony between our real and ideal selves.

A final note regarding the pervasiveness of leadership in our lives

It is hard to deny that leadership has benefit for us professionally as well as personally. Unfortunately, our training as dentists has afforded us little opportunity to develop ourselves as leaders. This is through no fault of our own, or our educational system. There is simply no time to effectively develop leadership skills in the dental curriculum.

It has been my intention, by publishing this series on leadership, to expose us to the transformational nature of leadership in our lives. I hope that in some way I have been able to spark an interest in each of you to pursue further knowledge in this most rewarding and beneficial area. 