

Reflections on Leadership



New Year's Resolutions – Setting Goals, Shaping Habits, Finding Meaning

January 2017

The beginning of a new year is typically a time of reflection and change.

Television programs feature special segments on self-improvement that involves making resolutions to change something for the better. The following is a list of the most common New Year's resolutions taken from several sources (listed in no particular order):



10 New Year's Resolutions for Teens”.

I have to admit that when my children were teenagers, I did not have the courage to engage them in this kind of process. This proves that that even optimistic people know their limits.

Every year my New Year's resolution setting begins with a look back on the list of resolutions from last year to gauge my progress and make up a new list. Many of the same things appear year after year. Losing weight, devoting more time to family, developing a better sense of work / life balance, reading and educational goals, all seem to reappear when the new list is made. I do better on some than others, but the list seems to be nearly the same every year.

The few occasions when I have managed to successfully make and keep a New Year's resolution throughout the year have been a combination of goal setting and forming good habits that made sure that I did not fall back into

my prior behavior. Charles Duhigg, the New York Times best-selling author has written extensively on setting goals and forming new habits. His books, **Better, Smarter, Faster, The Secrets of Being Productive in Life and Business**, and **The Power of Habit, Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business**, offer great insights on goal setting and how habits work.

Setting Goals

Even knowing that resolutions are so hard to keep we insist on going through the exercise of setting goals. This is because we know that goals are needed in every phase of life if we are to move forward. Resolutions are most likely to be kept if you create a plan, write down your resolution and plan, think about the goal as a year round activity, and remain flexible. There is nothing earth shattering in this approach. It is good, common sense advice, but it is also backed up by research.

According to Duhigg, the process of goal setting has a powerful effect on motivation. He states that “When people believe that they are in control they tend to work harder and push themselves more.” Life is full of choices, and when you make choices you have a feeling that you are in charge. So the process of reflection and setting goals is by its very nature an empowering exercise.

If you cannot find something on this list that appeals to you, do not despair. There are web sites to help you with your New Year's resolutions, including a list of “Top 50 New Year Resolutions”, and a New Year's Resolution Worksheet. If you are interested in making this a family experience, there is even a “Top

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But just setting a goal is not enough - the way you set goals is important. Duhigg highlights a goal setting process used at General Electric (GE) called SMART goals. SMART is an acronym for: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timeline. According to those who study goal setting, breaking a goal into SMART components is the difference between hoping something comes true and figuring out how to do it. But GE eventually found out that applying SMART goals was insufficient, because it was possible to follow the process while concentrating on areas that were not critical for success. So GE added stretch goals – identifying areas that were both challenging and important. The key to stretch goals was to find a goal that is challenging, but not so far out of reach that it crushed morale. For GE and other companies, combining SMART thinking and stretch goals created the right combination for success. Personal applications of this approach are not hard to imagine.



Shaping Habits

All human beings are creatures of habit. Some habits are good, while others are not so good. Most of the goals we set (including New Year's resolutions) involve changing an old habit or embracing a new one. The key to self-discipline seems to be found in finding

ways to override bad habits that hold us back, and to embrace new habits that help us to reach our desired goals.

Some people seem to have an easier time than the rest of us when it comes to embracing life changing habits. I have a friend who is about my age (in his 60's) who is an ultra marathoner. He travels around the country to competitively race in these 50 mile events. His ability to do this is rooted in a daily routine that includes getting up at 4:00 am and running in excess of 10 miles every morning. I suspect that this is not a carefully considered decision at the start of each day. It is a habit that is the result of making a scheduling decision at some point in time and sticking with it.

Research tells us that habits cannot be eradicated – they must instead, be replaced. The key to replacement is to find an alternate routine, and if possible, find the support of others to help you make the change permanent. All of this sounds easy, but is extremely difficult – and the reason why many New Year's resolutions do not result in permanent change. Just drive by the parking lot of any fitness center in January and you can get an idea of how many people have good intentions. Return in to the same parking lot in April, and you will see a much smaller crowd.

Finding Meaning

As important as setting goals and changing habits can be in improving life circumstances, there are limits to what can be achieved using this approach. It is entirely possible for a person to set impressive goals, embrace an entirely new set of good habits permanently change their way of living,

and still be unfulfilled at the end of the day.

Tim Keller, noted author and pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, has written frequently about finding meaning in life. In his recent book, **Making Sense Out of God**, he states, "To have meaning in life is to have both an overall purpose for living and the assurance that you are making a difference by serving some good beyond yourself." He further observes "even those who have good jobs, family and friends, and live in a materially comfortable way need to understand what that activity is being done for".



Fully understanding and appreciating the value of having a meaningful life may be the first step in making New Year's resolutions that go well beyond superficial goals that, even when achieved, do not provide lasting satisfaction.

My New Year's wish for all of you is that in addition to making and successfully keeping your New Year's resolutions, you find meaning and true happiness in 2017.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive script.

Reflections on Leadership



Starting with Why

February 2017

In 2009 Simon Sinek wrote a best-selling book titled *Start With Why: How Good Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*. In the book he put forward the idea that the message of every organization needs to start by addressing the question of why – “*What is your purpose, cause, or belief*”. He argued that this approach is essential in meeting the basic human need to belong – a feeling based on shared values or beliefs. The discipline of how something is done, and the consistency of what an organization does is still required, but cannot replace the motivation of staff and the loyalty of customers that occurs when everyone understands why an organization was founded and what it believes.

Recently Sinek was featured in a YouTube conversation on the attitudes of Millennials (those born between 1982 and 2000). This very entertaining discussion focuses on how the millennial point of view was shaped by family life and education, and why this represents a challenge to the organizations that employ them. It turns out that this particular generation entering the workforce is even more inclined to look for meaning in their work and to focus on the question of why. From my perspective, this is a trend that we are likely to see in future generations as well.

Understanding the question of why is not just about reaching the millennial generation. It has been an important consideration across time and cultures. In the years following the opening of China in the late 1980's, a number of



groups of young professional people from China visited the United States to learn about American culture. Bill Moyer, one of PSL's board members with extensive international experience and I were asked to host a Chinese group studying retirement and senior care. The tour and conversation was cordial and informative. But when we mentioned PSL's commitment to providing charity care to those with insufficient resources, the conversation became much more animated. Why would someone do such a thing for a person that was not a family member? Who are these donors who just give their money away? What is in it for them?

Pointing to PSL's history did not seem to provide much clarity. Why would a woman of means like Ellen Parker, forgo a life of comfort and ease to serve seniors and children with her time, attention, and wealth? Why would individuals and churches pool their resources to meet the needs of individuals that were largely ignored

by governmental and other private interests? The only thing that made sense to our new Chinese friends was the donor getting a break on their taxes.

For PSL the question of why has historically been addressed by our mission statement and values. Recently the PSL Board undertook the task of updating the mission statement and values to provide a better, more concise expression - answering the question posed by Sinek; “*What is your purpose, cause, or belief*?” The following is the revised PSL Mission and Values:

Presbyterian Senior Living Mission Statement

Guided by the life and teachings of Jesus, the mission of Presbyterian Senior Living is to provide compassionate, vibrant and supportive communities and services to promote wholeness of body, mind and spirit.

ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES

- 1. Inclusive** – Reach out to include all persons in the communities in which we serve, as recipients of service, employees, and volunteers.
- 2. Transparency / Integrity** – Adhere to the highest standards of transparency, honesty and impartiality to assure the public trust in the organization and its mission.
- 3. Quality** – Promote successful aging and enhance the quality of life of those we serve through the

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provision of exceptional services, innovation, maximizing the options available to seniors, and empowering them to choose the services that best meet their needs.

4. Stewardship – Be good stewards of the resources available to the organization with the goal of achieving the greatest good to the greatest number of seniors in the most cost effective manner possible, and to focus on environmentally sustainable practices in every aspect of PSL’s ministry.

5. People – Provide PSL staff and volunteers with a supportive, rewarding and challenging environment that gives opportunity for a satisfying experience in the service of others.

6. Community Benefit – In addition to providing subsidized care to those with limited financial resources, offering support to local people, clubs, schools, churches and social service agencies, and governmental entities to strengthen the fabric of the communities we service.

Many aspects of the mission statement are the same, or similar to the previous mission statement: like compassion; vibrant, supportive communities (Belonging); and wholeness of body mind and spirit.

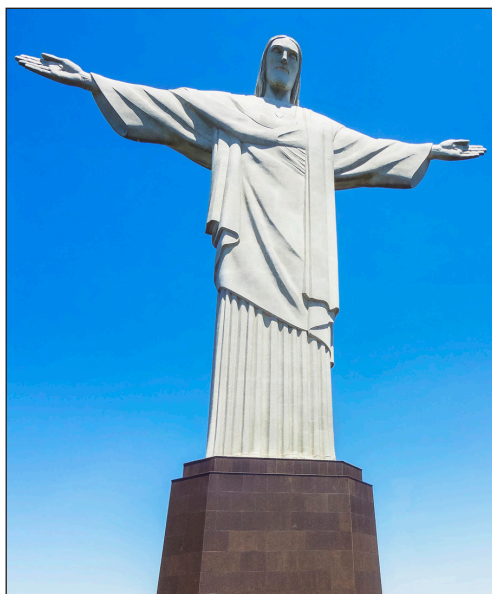
The new term “Guided by the life and teachings of Jesus” replaced the previous phrase “Christian understanding”. It was felt that this revision affirmed PSL’s faith based reason for existence better than the term “Christian” that in recent years had been used in a more politicized context.

So what is meant when we say that PSL is “Guided by the life and teachings of Jesus? First of all, as a Jew, his teachings were based on the Old Testament concepts of justice, love of God, and

love of neighbor. One of my favorite expressions is found in Micah 6:8 – *“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and walk humbly with your God?”* Jesus’ own words from Matt 22:37 illustrates this foundation – When asked by a group of Pharisees, which is the great commandment in the Law, he replied, quoting from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments rest all the Law and the Prophets.”*

But Jesus expanded these on these concepts, often taking them to somewhat uncomfortable dimensions. For example:

- Love means being inclusive, reaching out to all. Jesus was known as the friend of sinners and the outcasts of his time, even those considered untouchable by the rest of society. (Mark 2:16-17). (Mark 1:40- 42).
- To whom should love be extended? We should love even those who are considered our enemies (Luke 6:35).



- Who is your neighbor, and what does compassion look like? The parable of the Good Samaritan in the 10th chapter of Luke illustrates that everyone is your neighbor, and compassion is the expectation for every person. Sometimes the most virtuous among us are the least outwardly religious.
- Is there a limit to forgiveness to those who have wronged us? Forgiveness should be extended indefinitely – seventy times seven. (Matthew 18:21 – 22).
- What is generosity? Generosity is measured by the intention and depth of sacrifice – as illustrated in the Widows mite (Luke 21, 3-4).

These are just a few of the examples of what it means to be guided by the life and teachings of Jesus in the work of Presbyterian Senior Living. Notice that these expressions are free of judgmental and condescending attitudes that often characterize people across all social, religious, and political boundaries in our modern society. The self-righteous are not examples of Jesus’ life and teachings.

It is my experience that Sinek is spot on in his observation about the need to start with answering the question Why. I also believe that organizations that adhere to a well-crafted mission statement create an atmosphere where Tim Keller’s definition of meaning can be found - *“To have both an overall purpose for living and the assurance that you are making a difference by serving some good beyond yourself.”*

Blessings,

Reflections on Leadership



The Journey of Accountability

March 2017

Looking at the world today, one might come to the conclusion that we are suffering from an accountability crisis. Whether the discussion is about business, education, health care, politics, or the general subject of changing attitudes in society, the lack of personal accountability is a topic of conversation. In many respects, success in any area of life is tied to creating and sustaining a sense of accountability in individuals and teams of people who work together toward a common goal.

The definition of accountability I like best is pretty easy to understand. “Taking or being assigned responsibility for something you have done or are supposed to do.” Notice that there are two aspects of this definition – “taking” and “being assigned”. Both are essential, and I would argue that taking personal responsibility is required before any assignment to others is possible. We will try to deal with both of these concepts in what I refer to as the Journey of Accountability.

Steps in the Journey of Accountability:

The world is not always about me, and it is not always fair.

The most common mistake people make in terms of embracing personal and professional accountability is the unfairness excuse. In a perfect world, every person or organization has the same opportunity to succeed. Unfortunately the world is not a fair

place, and there may be occasions when the deck is stacked against us. What are some of the most likely reasons for unfairness? Here are a few examples – an adverse regulatory environment, anemic economy, difficult labor market, competitors with a financial or structural advantage – and the list could go on. Many (if not all) of these things may be true at any given time, and it is easy to get stuck and never move on from being the victim of an unfair world. It is critical for leaders to acknowledge that they are not the only ones who have to struggle with unfair conditions. The question is this – Knowing that the world is an inherently unfair place, what decisions can we make to lead our team to excel in this environment?

I cannot wait for the world to change to accommodate me, or change the world to meet my needs.

But I can change my behavior in response to the conditions around me. It can be tempting to look around and decide to wait until conditions improve before taking on the hard work of leadership. Unfortunately, this can become an ever receding goal line that leads to perpetual procrastination. The conditions are what they are, but the effectiveness of leadership is the variable that will distinguish the successful from those who fail. Leading involves doing something positive to make a difference. Accountability

in leadership is anchored in a predisposition toward action, rather than the tendency to wait and react.



The Journey of Accountability must start from within.

Before a leader can hold others accountable, they must model personal accountability. For every leader, accountability starts by looking in the mirror. Many leaders fail at this step, assuming that accountability is all about holding others to their tasks, often using a blaming tone as a method for pointing out who is at fault. Skipping the step of modeling personal accountability can make it impossible to inspire others to join you in the Journey of Accountability. In the book, *The Oz Principle*, authors Connors, Smith, and Hickman make it clear that the question of accountability is not focused on others. Its' origins are highly personal. They pose the essential leadership question “What else can I do to rise above my circumstances and achieve the results I desire?”

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Clarifying expectations of myself and others must precede any serious effort to improve accountability.

One of the common failures in leadership is lack of clarity in expectations in ourselves and those around us. It is impossible to be accountable for achieving a result that has not been well defined, including how the individual's day to day work contributes to the achievement of the overall goal. This is why position descriptions are important and timely feedback is critical in the relationship between a leader and his or her team. If your team is underperforming, the first question to ask is whether or not the expectations are clear.

As a leader I need to acknowledge my own role and responsibility for establishing a climate of accountability.

In my experience, accountability and empowerment are Siamese twins. Creating a climate of accountability starts with engaging your team in the discussion of accountability and how everyone can work together to achieve the desired result. It also means that when someone is accountable for a result, that they are empowered to take action. Assigning accountability and withholding the ability to take the initiative to do something positive will only result in lower morale and poor outcomes. The freedom to make well intentioned mistakes is a requirement for establishing a climate



where accountability is embraced. Finally, the language of blame placing must be expunged from the leadership lexicon. I like a quote that is attributed to basketball coaching icon, John Wooden. *"Nobody is a real loser until they start blaming someone else."*

The healthiest form of accountability in an organization is voluntary, mutual accountability that is imbedded within the culture of the organization.

Mutual accountability includes the freedom to respectfully express our expectations to other team members and to accept their observations about your own performance without becoming defensive. Candor in problem solving is at the heart of mutual accountability. If an individual team member is not behaving responsibly, someone must be willing to confront this shortcoming for the good of the organization. Mutual accountability does not give us the option of looking the other way and ignoring poor performance.

All healthy relationships have an element of accountability. Whenever I call my son to see if he can go fishing, his response is predictable. "Can I call you back? I need to check to make sure it is OK with my family schedule." As a husband and

father of two adorable children, he understands that being accountable for where you go and when you return conveys respect, commitment, and an understanding of the needs of the people he cares about most.

Accountability and Corrective Action

In some organizations "holding someone accountable" has been translated into taking corrective action. This confusion can be particularly counterproductive, and should be strenuously avoided. While a corrective action process may be a necessary form of discipline when circumstances require, pairing corrective action with the broader concept of accountability can seriously erode the positive aspects of accountability in the organization's culture as people aspire to work together in a trusting and cohesive spirit every day.

Ultimate Accountability

Finally, accountability has a spiritual dimension. Stewardship – one of PSL's founding leadership principles is based on the principle that every person is accountable to God, the creator and sustainer of all things. Stewardship calls us to be accountable for how we use every resource - time, talent, money, our community relationships, the environment, and even the opportunities to reach out to help those in need. This is an accountability that supersedes all others, and provides a clear model for how we should live every moment of life.

Reflections on Leadership



Looking for Grit

April 2017

Like many young people in the 1960's I began my working career at a very early age. Starting with doing lawn work and doing assorted household chores for neighbors at age eleven, I graduated to working at a local chair rental business, delivering tables and chairs for special events (which in retrospect was probably a violation of child labor laws). In each of these situations, the opportunity to earn spending money provided a measure of financial independence. Just after my 12th birthday, I joined the ranks of thousands of young people delivering the *Grit* newspaper.

The *Grit* was a weekly publication that had a distinctly rural character, featuring human interest stories, recipes, and a lot of good news. Founded in 1882, the *Grit* reached a circulation of more than 500,000 by 1934, when it adopted the tagline, "America's Greatest Family Newspaper". The distribution of the *Grit* newspaper was dependent on an army of over 30,000 young people,

who sold the newspapers across the country. At its peak circulation in 1969, the *Grit* had a circulation in excess of 1.5 million. Each paper was

delivered by a child and all of the money was likewise collected by children and sent to *Grit's* main office (in Williamsport, Pennsylvania) by snail mail. There are a lot of reasons why the model no longer works, and the heyday of the *Grit* has long since passed, but the lessons learned from the experience remain with me to this very day.

Every *Grit* delivery person ordered newspapers each week, paying 10 cents for each copy. The sales price of each newspaper was 15 cents, and the potential profit depended on whether or not you could sell all of the papers you ordered. It was possible to actually lose money if I failed to sell at least 2/3 of my order. My "business" was developed by going door to door to establish a customer base for regular delivery, with the last copies being sold on the street corner to passing shoppers. Being a *Grit* delivery person was not an easy thing to do. Winters in Michigan could be brutal, and you only got paid if you delivered the paper on time. But the opportunity to earn a couple of dollars a week was a powerful incentive for a youngster with initiative and a willingness to take risks.

What I did not understand at the time was that I was getting a great lesson on the realities of running a small business. In addition to the obvious sales requirements, there was management of inventory, logistics –

setting up the most efficient delivery route, estimating the risk of ordering copies with the hope of finding new customers, and the urgency of dealing with a perishable product. The importance of collections and an understanding of profit and loss were also important lessons learned. Eventually I was able to build up to 40 regular customers and routinely ordered an extra 5 copies to be sold on the street. On a good week I could make the grand sum of \$2.25.



I was not alone in choosing to deliver newspapers to begin my work life. Warren Buffet, Martin Luther King, Jr., John Wayne, Walt Disney, Harry Truman and Wayne Gretzky are listed among those who started their careers the same way.

All of these childhood memories returned to me recently as I read Angela Duckworth's New York Times best-selling book **Grit**. It turns out that the name chosen for the newspaper in the 1880's still describes a character trait that is essential to success in life. While her book has an obvious application to business, the stories related to parenting, successful



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spelling bee competitors, football coaches, and cartoonists demonstrate that the concept of grit has a broad application.

Duckworth claims that based on her research and experience as a McKinsey consultant, organizations are “distracted by talent” when they should be more focused on effort as a determinant of success. She goes so far as to theorize that effort is twice as important as talent in the following formula:

$$\text{talent} \times \text{effort} = \text{skill}$$

$$\text{skill} \times \text{effort} = \text{achievement}$$

When a person with talent applies effort, they develop a skill - something that they become relatively good at doing. But this is just the beginning. It is not until a person takes the skill they have developed and apply another measure of effort that achievement is realized. It is the application of effort that Duckworth calls grit.

As a disciplined researcher she has developed a “Grit Scale” to measure tendencies and to test out the correlation between the gritty personality and success, and

has applied this scale to literally thousands of individuals. In case after case she illustrates that success is less about being the best and brightest, and more about being the “grittiest” or most determined person. Overcoming obstacles to achieve excellence requires grit. Nothing else will do.

When it comes to teams and how they achieve success, she advocates surrounding yourself with persons who possess grit. She states *“If you want to be grittier, find a gritty culture and join it. If you are a leader and you want people in your organization to be grittier, create a gritty culture.”*

Duckworth concludes that grit, while critical to success, is not the most important virtue for a person to have in life. She separates virtues into three distinct categories:

- Interpersonal (heart) – moral character
- Intellectual (mind) – curiosity and passion for learning
- Intrapersonal (will) - self-control, self-management, and performance character

Grit is intrapersonal. It may help you to be more successful, but it will not necessarily help you to become a better person. When forced to choose between greatness and goodness, Duckworth says that as a parent, she would choose goodness for her children before the grit that would move them toward great achievement.

There is no better illustration of a life of grit than the Apostle Paul. In his call to spread the gospel he was shipwrecked three times, stoned, endured several beatings, confronted robbers, and was frequently hungry and cold. His was a life lived in peril. In his letter to the Romans (chapter 5) he observed that *“endurance produces character and character produces hope”*. It seems like the road to character has a gritty surface.

Grit is a wonderful reminder to all of us that it is not just the intellectually gifted or those born to a life of advantage that can succeed in reaching their desired goals. Determination can level the playing field. Grit can be learned, and is well within reach for all of us.

My experience delivering *Grit* newspapers was not just learning about business or making money. My customers were almost all older adults, many of whom I learned to appreciate for their humor, wisdom, and especially their independence and strength of will. That appreciation eventually led to my vocational calling to serve seniors. Even a 12 year old boy can spot the value of true grit in action.



Reflections on Leadership



Compassion

May 2017

One of the foundation stones of the ministry of Presbyterian Senior Living is compassion. The records from the early founders of PSL indicated that they were moved by compassion and concern for the welfare of orphans and aging persons in a time before the social safety net of Medicaid, Medicare, and Social Security. The term compassion has been a part of the PSL mission statement for over 35 years.

But the question arises – beyond an expression of the intentions of a faith based, mission driven organization dedicated to serving seniors, what is the role of compassion in the day to day work of people of all walks of life? From my perspective, the best way to answer this question is to start with a clear understanding of what compassion is, and is not.



In his recent book, **Against Empathy, The Case for Rational Compassion**, Paul Bloom argues that our society is enamored with the concept of

empathy, and confuses empathy with the more useful compassion. This confusion is confirmed by some of the dictionary definitions for compassion that list empathy as a synonym or closely related word. Bloom defines empathy as *“the act of feeling what you believe other people feel.”* He claims that *“empathy is biased... short sighted, motivating actions that might make things better in the short run, but lead to tragic results in the future... favoring one over the many.”*

I think Bloom has a valid point. A person may develop a better understanding and empathy for a person by *“walking a mile in their shoes”*, but that is not enough to produce positive results. Empathy (intensely feeling what other people feel) can trigger an emotional and sympathetic response that may not be entirely rational or kind. In the extreme, empathy with the victim of a crime can inspire a mob reaction that is later determined to be irrational, unjustified, and even cruel.

How does compassion differ from empathy? Bloom quotes authors Tanya Singer and Olga Klimecki, *“In contrast to empathy, compassion does not mean sharing the suffering of the other; rather it is characterized by feelings of warmth, concern, and care for the other, as well as a strong motivation to improve the other’s well-being. Compassion is feeling for and not feeling with the other.”* The presence of



warmth, concern and care drives a more consistently positive response.

Not being an academic, I like the relatively simple working definition of compassion as a *“combination of deep understanding, concern, and a willingness to act on that concern on behalf of oneself and others”*. This seems to catch the essence of compassion in a way that translates more easily into daily life and work.

In his book *Resonant Leadership*, Richard Boyatzis offered a number of reasons why compassion produces better leaders and important organizational results. The regular practice of compassion by leadership results in the development of more people in the organization as leaders, higher commitment to organizational goals, improved responsiveness to customers, and a sense of shared community and social responsibility. All of these activities spring from truly caring about those you work with and around, listening better, and fostering compassion by personal example.

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To illustrate how this plays out in the everyday work in an organization dedicated to serving others he offered the following statement, used by a hospital to connect compassion with the way they should behave as employees:

"You are what people see when they arrive here. Yours are the eyes they look into when they are frightened and lonely. Yours are the voices people hear when they ride the elevators and when they try to sleep and when they need to forget their problems. You are what they hear when they are on the way to their appointments that could affect their destinies. And what they hear after they leave those appointments. Yours are the comments people hear when you think they can't. Yours is the intelligence and caring that people hope they find here. If you are noisy, so is the hospital. If you are rude, so is the hospital. And if you are wonderful, so is the hospital. No visitors, no patients, no physicians or co-workers can ever know the real you that you know is there, unless you let them see it. All they can know is what they see and hear and experience. And so we have a stake in your attitude and the collective attitudes of everyone that works here in the hospital. We are judged by your performance. We are the care you give, the attention you pay, the courtesies you extend."

As leaders, how can we create this kind of atmosphere? I think that the application of compassion is easier when we are less focused on ourselves and more focused on others. This is hard to do, and requires constant vigilance. The tendency to see ourselves as the center of the universe is a part of the human condition. Even the Golden Rule – "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Luke 6:31) – is an attempt to use the

focus on self as a benchmark to improve our behavior toward those around us. I believe that this Biblical standard (Matthew 22:39) is constructed with the understanding that all of us are essentially self-centered. The byproduct of being less focused on ourselves is that we will be more open and in touch with people and issues around us. Open communication and willingness to accept criticism without defensiveness will follow.



The most effective way we as leaders can inspire compassion in those we work with is by what Boyatzis calls, coaching with compassion. Mentoring, teaching, and assisting in the development of your fellow team members have a positive effect on those you coach. Every minute we spend coaching someone, we reaffirm their value as a human being, our willingness to invest in them, and our belief that they are important to achieving the organization's mission. It also has a powerful impact on the person doing the coaching.

The final truth in the discussion of creating a climate of compassion is that the only authentic way to inspire compassionate behavior toward the people we are called to serve is by fostering compassionate

relationships with each other. The most effective way we illustrate our expectations is to model the behavior we desire. We need to constantly ask ourselves "Can people see compassion in the way I relate to everyone around me?" If the answer is yes, we are on the way to creating a climate of compassion.

Final thoughts on compassion – Compassion is:

- Always evidenced by action.
- A spiritual response connected to justice and mercy (Micah 6:8) and illustrated by Jesus in his life (Mark 6:34).
- A central part of an authentic leader's mission to serve others and a key ingredient in being an effective leader.
- Closely connected with servant leadership. Servant leaders are by nature compassionate toward others.

Blessings,

Reflections on Leadership



Confronting Problem Situations

June 2017

There are many ways that leaders inspire those around them to superior performance. Providing words of encouragement, modeling the behavior that is expected from others, focusing on common goals and objectives, putting the needs of others above self-interest, actively listening, treating others with kindness and compassion, teaching and mentoring co-workers, showing appreciation to team members, setting high standards for themselves and others, and laying the groundwork for change are among the array of tools in the leaders toolbox.

But there are occasions when the more nurturing approaches to leadership are not successful in solving a problem, and more direct action is needed. While there are all kinds of books on “feel good” leadership topics, less is written about what to do in tough situations that are likely to make people feel uncomfortable. I believe that there are a number of reasons why the subject of confronting problem situations is avoided in leadership literature.

First of all, nearly every human being (including those in leadership positions) has a need to have other people think well of them. This tendency is not a terrible human shortcoming. The small number of people who truly do not care what people think of them struggle with other relationship issues that are likely to make them ineffective leaders. Most of us can recall how it felt to be on the other end of a

conversation that created discomfort, and we may have even resented the person who was insistent that the problem be addressed. The difficulty with being a leader is that the desire to be liked cannot come at the expense of avoiding the hard decisions that are needed to achieve the organization’s mission. The first rule of leadership is that the mission is paramount.



Secondly, most leaders (me included) favor a slower, persuasive, and less direct approach whenever possible. This is a desirable tendency, and works well when the pressure of time is not a critical factor and the consequences of failure do not threaten the organization. However, when problems reach a certain level and the pressure of time and the consequence of inaction are acute, softer leadership techniques are less effective. One key is to understand that the individuals involved in dealing with a problem may have different perceptions of the risk to the organization. When one party perceives the situation to be urgent and the consequence of failure to be serious and this opinion is not shared by others on the team, tensions are

likely to increase. It is up to the leader to ensure that the gravity of the situation and the risks posed by a poor outcome is clearly understood.

Thirdly, we have all experienced occasions when things have just gotten better with the passage of time. This is the best rationale for a patient approach to problem solving. It is also the cause of the greatest source of regret when things do not get better, and more drastic steps need to be taken at a later time. There is an old saying that goes something like this – “Whatever you are trying to avoid will not go away until you confront it”. Avoidance almost always makes a situation worse, and the likelihood is that the problem will grow and become increasingly unmanageable.

Finally, it is possible for a leader to assume that a more confrontational approach may be inherently disrespectful, especially if dealing with a problem forcefully has a high probability of eliciting an emotional response from a co-worker. While kindness and respect are virtues, they can also become faults if they distort or understate a message that must be heard. One could argue that it is more compassionate to hurt someone’s feelings and warn them of impending danger than to remain silent and witness an avoidable tragedy.

Over the years I have discovered that it is possible to learn the most valuable lessons from those who make us unhappy at the moment. My least favorite teacher in my entire

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formal learning experience was my 10th grade English teacher, Mr. Hayward. Before taking his class, I was accustomed to getting good grades with a minimal amount of effort. The most charitable way to describe Mr. Hayward is that he was a blunt and merciless critic. Papers that I thought were pretty well constructed came back to me in pieces, covered with so much red ink that I could hardly make out what I had originally written. I struggled to get B's and C's in his class, as did many of my classmates. It was a relief to finish the year and move on. At the time I believed that he was just a difficult human being who enjoyed making me miserable. Several years later, when taking a writing class in college, I developed a new appreciation of what he had done for me. I quickly discovered that the lessons learned in his class made me a better writer than 90% of my fellow students. Much of my ability to use the written word today can be traced back to his teaching. I now believe that because he cared about his students and their future, he was willing to be less popular than other teachers. While I cannot name many of my old high school teachers, Mr. Hayward is an exception. Forty years later I still appreciate his work.

In spite of this experience, I remain wary of those leaders who continually use a type of disrespectful or biting "honesty" that causes pain in their relationships in the workplace. Over the years I have developed a few questions that I believe help to promote a sense of balance when a



more confrontational approach to problem solving is required.

If you are the leader who feels that the situation calls for a change in tactics, ask yourself the following questions before taking a confrontational approach:

- Am I certain of the accuracy of the facts in this situation, or could I be making a premature (and possibly inaccurate) judgement?
- Up to this point has my message been well organized and clearly articulated?
- Have I tried other leadership approaches before resorting to a more confrontational position?
- Are my motives pure? Do I really have the best interests of my co-workers, and the organization at heart?
- Is there anything in my conduct that undermines the message that I am trying to send – like a related or similar situation that I am ignoring or treating differently than the issue at hand?
- Is my approach driven by a sense of personal frustration, anger or impatience? (Proceed only when you can answer no to this question.)
- Is the intensity of my approach commensurate with the gravity of the situation at hand?
- Is the message I am about to give focused on the behavior that needs to be changed rather than the individuals involved in the discussion?
- How will what I am about to say affect my relationship with the rest of the team in the future? If there is damage, what is my plan to repair the relationship and restore it to its normally healthy state?

If you find yourself on the receiving end of what you believe is a confrontational approach to solving a problem, ask yourself the following questions:

- Up to this point have I chosen to use a kinder and gentler approach to avoid changing my behavior to deal with a hard set of circumstances?
- Have I been prone to offering excuses for lack of progress in place of action that has delivered measurable progress?
- Have I allowed personal relationships or emotions to get in the way of improvement or finding a solution?
- Is it possible that up to this point my approach could be interpreted as understating the importance and urgency that I feel about this situation?
- Do I understand or appreciate why others may have a different perspective on the nature of the problem being addressed?
- Do the facts support a stronger or more urgent response than I have displayed thus far?

The need to confront problems directly while maintaining a sense of unity was addressed by the Apostle Paul in the book of Ephesians. He encourages those in the church to "speak the truth in love" and points to this approach as evidence of maturity and growth in an effort to follow the example of Jesus. If this advice is taken to heart, it is possible to positively resolve the most difficult and sensitive matters, even if the initial conversation causes temporary discomfort.

Blessings,

Reflections on Leadership



Getting Personal

July 2017

One of my favorite movies is the 1990's classic "You've Got Mail". The movie is about the owner of a small bookstore that is being put out of business by a super-sized bookstore chain (which is pretty ironic because in the intervening years large chain bookstores have been under attack by Amazon and other online sources). In one memorable e-mail exchange between the two main characters, Tom Hanks – the owner of Fox Books, explains to Meg Ryan, the owner of the small neighborhood children's bookstore, The Shop Around the Corner, that the conflict between the two business enterprises is not personal. Meg Ryan strongly disagrees and her response concludes with the following:

And what's so wrong with being personal, anyway?... Whatever else anything is, it ought to begin by being personal.

I was thinking about this insightful comment and how it applies to our work in serving seniors. For most of PSL's 90 year history we have been focused on the personal touch in our relationship with the people we serve. The original model for PSL's personal care facilities was described in the byline on our letterhead in the 1940's – "Small, Scattered, Homelike Homes for

the Aging". Each location had less than 30 residents and featured a live in administrator and family style dining. In this intensely personal environment staff and residents became like family.

In more recent years the Culture Change Network has coined the term "Person Centered Care" as the best way to describe the intention to make services responsive to the personal needs and desires of each individual. PSL has been active in this person centered movement and has worked to apply these concepts throughout the continuum of services to seniors. In an era of heightened regulation and a more medically complex environment, a person centered approach can be challenging. But the person centered approach is the lens through which we at PSL see the future of aging services.

As a faith based organization, this personal approach is more than a good model for providing services. It reflects a spiritual concept – That every person is an eternal being, created by a loving God. This is best expressed by one of my all-time favorite quotes from the theologian C.S. Lewis:

You don't have a soul. You are a soul – you have a body. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a

mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization – these are mortal, and their life to ours is as the life of a gnat. But it is the immortals we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit... Next to ... (God himself) your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses."

This view of the world changes everything in the way we relate to those around us. Everyone deserves respect and kindness. Every person – even the most flawed and marginalized among us is to be treated with great care as the holiest of objects.



For PSL leaders and team members this philosophy should be extended to every person we work with and every new person who joins the PSL team. From a system perspective, person centered concepts are being embraced as part of the recruitment, hiring, onboarding, and staff education / retention processes. But constructing

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and implementing an effective person centered approach to staff engagement will require the effort of every PSL team member regardless of their position. For example, staff retention and turnover is profoundly affected by whether or not each new team member is embraced or treated with indifference by their immediate supervisor and the people they work with. The same is true in the cultivation of relationships between long time staff members. People who have a personal connection with the people they work with tend to stay for a long time.

So how does this “personal” thing happen between people who work together on a day to day basis? Ty Bennett in his little book “The Power of Influence” argues for what he calls “Outward thinking”. Being outwardly focused involves paying attention to others, adding value to their lives, celebrating their triumphs, ultimately influencing them in a positive way. He also talks about the power of investing in others. One of the ways we invest in those around us is by creating a personal connection. He observes:

- *When we talk to people personally and not just professionally, we connect.*
- *When we open up personally, others can relate.*
- *When we are vulnerable and authentic, we allow others to be the same, and we bond.*

Bennett continues by explaining the being “other focused” takes practice – like spending more time being interested **in** people than trying to be an interesting person **to** others.

Fundamental to this effort is a genuine curiosity about those around you. What are their likes and interests? What do they value in life? What are they most proud of in their life experience? What are their goals and aspirations for the future? When we connect with someone on this level friendships will grow naturally.

There is always the risk of making someone uncomfortable by being intrusive or providing too much information. It is important to set appropriate boundaries, and to keep confidences when personal information is shared. But genuine interest and concern for other human beings can create bonds of affection that can combine to make for a satisfying work and life experience.



About 10 years ago I had the opportunity to visit a staff person that I had hired as a nurse in 1977. At the time she was hired she was in her middle 50's. Now in her middle 80's she had recently become too ill to work and I was stopping by her home to present her with a 30 year service pin. It was a wonderful visit. She regaled me with stories of residents and staff that she had loved in her 30 years of employment. She told me about her employment interview

more than 30 years earlier. PSL was one of several places where she had interviewed, and she had a number of opportunities to choose from. She said that before that day she had never considered working with seniors in long term care. But when she visited us, she knew immediately that this was the place for her. She was treated with kindness and courtesy by everyone from the receptionist to the departmental staff as they passed through the lobby. Following her employment she developed friendships with those she worked with every day. Reflecting her experience over the past 30 years, she knew that she had made the right decision. That conversation remains in my memory as a sacred moment.

What is the lesson from this story? Each of us can contribute to creating a positive work environment. Our efforts to personally connect with others can have powerful and enduring consequences. We can start by following the advice from the movie “You’ve Got Mail”. **“Whatever else anything is, it ought to begin by being personal.”**

Blessings,

Reflections on Leadership



Thoughts on Change

August 2017

For most people and organizations, the idea of change is both hopeful and terrifying. We all hope for a better future, and that things that are difficult or problematic now will improve. But the idea of change can also be troublesome, especially if the change involves risk or leaving your personal comfort zone to embrace something new.

The deep seated nature of the reluctance to change was humorously illustrated in one of my favorite television shows – The Red Green Show, a comedy which ran from 1991 to 2006. The main Character (Red Green) was a bearded Canadian carpenter who had 1000 uses for duct tape. Most episodes were closed with a meeting of the Possum Lodge, which featured *“The Man’s Prayer”* - *“I’m a man, I can change, if I have to, I guess”*. As ridiculous as this prayer sounded, deep down it contained an uncomfortable ring of truth. Change is something that is to be resisted. Author Holly Black expressed this approach to change a bit more cynically, “Changing is what people do when they have no options left”.

But the negative view of change that is so often cited as common to the human condition is an incomplete and possibly inaccurate description. Some years ago I heard a speaker on change who told those of us in the audience that there was ample evidence to support the idea that people are inclined to change, even

when they know that change before them is profound. To support his premise, he flashed two photographs on the screen. The first was a photograph of a couple dressed in a tuxedo and flowing white wedding dress. The second photo was of a parent holding a newborn baby. Everyone got the point. These photos represented what many believe are the two most significant changes that can happen in a person’s life, and literally millions of people across the world eagerly embrace these changes every year. This is even more astounding when you realize that many families opt to have more than one child, and a high percentage of widowed or divorced individuals choose to remarry. So do people resist or embrace change? The answer is – “That depends”.



Some changes are accepted gradually with relative ease, even though the impact of change is far reaching. I am old enough to recall the first portable cell phones. Calling these phones portable was a generous statement. These “bag phones” were powered by a battery that was marginally smaller than a car battery, and featured a magnetic, hardwired antenna which

you could place on the roof of your car. This primitive instrument was quite a timesaving invention. I now carry a device that communicates on multiple platforms – e mail, telephone, voice mail, text, social media, internet access, and a host of apps that make life easier. The magnitude of this change is enormous, but I do not consider this to be traumatic in any way. New communication patterns have become so much a part of my life that it is hard to remember what it was like before. It seems that huge changes can sneak up on us and become a “new normal”.



Leadership and Change

In many respects, change and leadership are synonymous. Leaders are rarely, if ever, needed in a static world. But when the status quo no longer works, or the environment is characterized as being in a constant state of change, leadership is the difference between success and failure, relevance or obsolescence. Recognizing the need for change, casting a new vision of the future, and engaging others in an organized process toward a new destination is the definition of leadership within an organization.

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Change can be easy to embrace in the abstract. Many leaders are strong advocates for change when they are the ones who get to inflict change on others and insulate themselves from the consequences of change. Tolstoy observed that, “Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself”. The truth is that all meaningful change starts with changing yourself first. Gandhi said it best, “Be the change you wish to see in the world”. Start with yourself, and almost any change is possible. Leaders must model the change they expect from others. But leaders often fail to understand that even the most straightforward and logical change can have very personal consequences for someone else. Change always has a personal dimension, both to the leader and to everyone on his or her team.

I recently fielded a call from a very bright graduate student who was interviewing leaders who were engaged in change processes. The questions were framed in such a way that change was viewed as a program with a starting date and an end point. Inquiry was made into how the program was structured, who played important roles in the change effort, the duration of the program, and how success was measured at the conclusion of the program. While some organizations approach change in this way, it seemed to miss the point that success in the long haul requires that change becomes a part



of the organization’s DNA. Programs come and go. Change is a constant.

Change is especially needed in times of adversity, and the case for making change can be easier at those times. But waiting until reaching the desperation threshold can be dangerous, severely limiting creative options due to constraints of limited time and money. Inspired change offers a greater promise of success, but is often hampered by inertia and hubris. Adopting the principle that organizational change is a constant which may vary in intensity keeps the need for change on the front burner.

I have a few specific suggestions regarding change for those who find themselves in positions of leadership:

- Foster an ongoing expectation of change as an essential ingredient for success. Emphasize that change is not just a response to failure (when you have no options left). Change is needed even when things are going well.
- Define the philosophy of change as an interactive process – engaging others to move forward rather than the leader announcing what is to be changed and expecting everyone else to fall in line.
- Build a case for why a particular change is needed and articulate the benefits to all of the stakeholders.

- Paint a clear picture of what you hope life will be like after the change.
- Involve your team members in defining what specifically needs to be changed and identify the steps in the process that will take the group from where they are now to where they are going.
- Outline how the communication process will work while the change is underway.
- Based on how success is going to be measured, identify milestones to celebrate along the way.
- Generously recognize people on your team who make significant contributions to the effort.

Leading change is not for the fainthearted. It is hard work. But leading change successfully can be among the most rewarding and personally satisfying experiences of life.

Reflections on Leadership



Facing Your Giants

September 2017

In 2008 my wife and I had the privilege of traveling to Israel. Part of the trip included visiting the place where the conflict between David and Goliath took place – the valley of Elah. For those who have not read the story, it can be found in I Samuel Chapter 17, verses 1-54. It is rich with detail as a titanic struggle between good and evil. For a few minutes I was able to touch the stones in the stream where scholars believe the young shepherd boy David collected 5 smooth stones in preparation for fighting the giant Philistine warrior Goliath. The images were striking. I could almost feel the drama of the story unfolding, imagining the thoughts of a shepherd selecting the stones that he was going to use in this life or death conflict.

At first glance David was not the logical one to take on such a daunting task. For several days Goliath had taunted the army of Israel, daring them to send out their best warrior to fight to the death. It was easy to see why no one had the courage to respond to the challenge. Goliath of Gath was a huge man. Depending on the source of the biblical text, his exact height



was somewhere between 6 feet 9 inches and 9 feet tall. He was an experienced warrior, well equipped for battle. Heavily armored with a bronze helmet, a coat of mail and javelin, the shaft of his spear was said to be “as large as a weaver’s beam”. In the face of such a scary image, the morale of the army of Israel was understandably low. The bible record was that they were “dismayed and greatly afraid”.

The description of David was much less impressive than that of Goliath. He was a “youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance”. Goliath also had a trash talking warrior’s attitude. Upon discovering that David was willing to accept the challenge, Goliath regarded David with disdain, shouting “Am I a dog that you come to me with sticks? Come to me and I will feed your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field”.

In his book, *“Facing Your Giants”*, Max Lucado uses the story of David and Goliath to illustrate that personal and professional challenges require the same strength and courage as challenging a giant on the field of battle. It is his contention that eventually everyone has to face a giant at some time in their life, and the lessons that can be learned from this Bible story can be applied to other seemingly insurmountable problems. Grief, family conflicts, economic failure,

shattered dreams, ethical dilemmas, and loneliness are just a few of the issues that he identifies as common giants that require an uncommon response. This resonates with my experience. If you take the time to listen to those around you, almost everyone has a story that includes particular issues or times in their life when they were severely challenged by circumstances or individuals that pushed them to the point of despair.

What does this story have to do with Leadership? First of all, leaders often struggle in the work they are called to do. Challenges can take many forms, like threats in the market place, financial pressure, the need for immediate and dramatic change, deciding who to trust and how to delegate when the margin for error is slim, disappointment in or betrayal of a co-worker, delivering bad news to the people you lead, or doing the right thing when the result is costly. The list goes on and on.

Some time ago I heard a vivid example of courageous leadership in an interview with former Marine, Donovan Campbell, as he described his platoon’s experience in Iraq in the book, *“Joker 1: A Marine’s Memoir”*. He noted that he had two basic objectives as the leader of his platoon – completing the mission with integrity and bringing his men home safely. One afternoon while on patrol, his platoon was

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attacked by a rocket that struck a group of nearby civilians, killing or wounding more than 20 children. He was faced with the dilemma of evacuating his men, knowing that another attack was inevitable if they remained in place, or staying to protect the school where the children were being held until medical attention could arrive. He chose to keep his men in place to protect the children, which ultimately cost the life of one of his soldiers. This is what a leader does when facing a giant.

What are the lessons in leadership from the story of David and Goliath?

- We, like David, must be convinced of the rightness of our cause.
- The role of faith in overcoming fear is critical. David was confident that God would help him to carry the day.
- Years of preparation often precede the challenge before us. David was not foolhardy. As a shepherd, he had successfully defended his flock from lions and bears.
- Be authentic. David was not comfortable, nor would he have been successful had he chosen to use Saul's sword and

armor. His tools were simple, but they were familiar to him.

- Run to meet the challenge – choose your battle ground.
- There is no room for conceit in victory. David was aware that God was the source of his strength, and did not take credit for the outcome. We all know that there will be times in life when we will be confronted by our own giants. They may come in the form of illness, death of a family member, a testing of our values, or someone or something that may seem to be influenced by the forces of evil. In such circumstances, recalling the story of David and Goliath can be a great comfort.

But there is more to the story than pure courage in the presence of adversity. In his book, *“David and Goliath”*, author Malcolm Gladwell points out that although David was powered by courage and faith, he also possessed a different set of skills. Instead of the close contact fighting that Goliath was expecting David had other ideas. Focused on speed and surprise with a different kind of weapon he fearlessly ran forward with his sling and bag full of stones. The outcome was not as surprising as one might imagine. Gladwell quotes historian Robert Dohrenwend, “Goliath had as much chance against David as any bronze age warrior with a sword would have against an opponent armed with a .45 automatic pistol.” The bulk of Gladwell's book focuses on stories of underdogs and how they battled the giants in their lives.

Gladwell contends that in today's constantly changing environment the key to success often rests with changing the techniques of battle, exchanging size and strength for speed and agility. In this context, courageous leadership involves embracing new approaches and making decisions faster than others who may possess greater wealth and raw power.



Next to the compass and picture of my wife and family I now keep a rock on my desk from the brook in the valley of Elah. It serves as a symbol of faith and readiness for whatever the future may hold. It is also a symbol of how the willingness to embrace change can overcome even the most formidable and scary challenges that leaders face each and every day.



Reflections on Leadership



Ancient Wisdom for Modern Times

October 2017

Watching the hurricane disasters in Texas and Florida has been both riveting and helpful to put the important things of life in perspective. The simultaneous unfolding of a complex drama – the power of the elements, loss of property and life, and human suffering is combined with extraordinary acts of kindness and heroism.

The water rescues featured a great number of people volunteering to help total strangers, crossing boundaries of race, religion, economic or social class and age. I appreciated Sandra Bullock's observation that "There are no politics in 8 feet of water. There are human beings in 8 feet of water." I was particularly touched by the rescues that involved children and the aged. My favorite was a photo of an older woman in a wheelchair being rescued in a boat, her hand being held by the younger man steering the boat during her rescue.

I have to confess that I had a personal interest in the flooding



in Houston. Alf Halvorson, a PSL board member and pastor of Memorial Drive Presbyterian Church, was in the thick of the rescue, housing people from his neighborhood in his home and working with the church staff to provide housing to several hundred people who were flooded out of their homes. They remain actively involved in the cleanup effort that will be ongoing for many months.

Witnessing this outpouring of humanitarian effort directed my thoughts to Jesus' question to the lawyer at the conclusion of the parable of the Good Samaritan in the Book of Luke, Chapter 10. "*Who proved to be the neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?*" To which the lawyer correctly replied, "*The one who showed him mercy*". In times of tragedy we seem to realize that we are called to be neighbors to everyone – not just those we agree with, or those with whom we have much in common.

Sadly, in the short time since the initial outpouring of kindness, there appears to be a slow drifting back to business as usual. Unfortunately, much of the pre hurricane normal is a caustic climate marked by sarcasm, negativity, and divisiveness. In this climate I find that I am listening to the news less, mostly because the tenor of the reporting from literally every news outlet has taken on such an angry tone. I recently

saw a bumper sticker that seemed to sum up this point of view "If you are not outraged, you are not paying attention". I am not certain that living in a constant state of outrage is healthy for anyone, but that is beside the point. This begs the question - Why, in the absence of tragedy, do we tend to revert to a spirit of negativity and bitterness that divides us?



This is not a judgement regarding whose view of the world is correct. It is more of an observation related to how we regard each other at work and in our home, community, and nation. I believe that the continual drumbeat of anger is by its' very nature corrosive, and none of us are entirely immune to its effects. This should be a matter of concern to us as leaders of Presbyterian Senior Living because it is difficult for compassion to be consistently sustained in the presence of anger. Since the core of our mission and work with seniors requires a healthy dose of compassion, I am afraid that the negative impact of the angry voices around us has the potential

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to erode this central virtue and hamper our effectiveness.

My wife and I have developed a habit of reading from a book of prayers every night before we go to bed as a way to clear our minds and end the day on a positive note. We especially like the ancient prayers from hundreds (sometimes thousands) of years ago that still speak to us today. Many of these prayers remind us that in spite of our surrounding circumstances, we are called to rise above our natural human impulses.

One of my very favorite prayers was written by Usebius, Bishop of Caesarea who lived from around 260 to 340 AD, and was credited with writing the authoritative history of the early Christian Church:

May I be no one's enemy, and may I be a friend of that which is eternal and abides.

May I never quarrel with those nearest me: and if I do, may I be reconciled quickly.

May I love, seek, and attain only that which is good.

May I wish for everyone's happiness and envy none.

May I never rejoice in the ill fortune of one who has wronged me.

When I have done or said what is wrong, may I never wait for the rebuke of others, but always rebuke myself until I make amends.

May I win no victory that harms either me or my opponent.

May I reconcile friends who are angry with one another.

May I, to the extent of my power, give all needful help to my friends and all who are in want.

May I never fail a friend who is in danger.

When visiting those in grief may I be able by gentle and healing words to soften their pain.

May I respect myself.

May I always keep tame that which rages within me.

May I accustom myself to be gentle, and never be angry with people because of circumstances.

May I never discuss who is wicked and what wicked things they have done, but to know good people and follow in their footsteps.

What is even more remarkable is the time in history that this prayer was written. Usebius' life coincided with the reign of Diocletian the Roman Emperor from 284 to 305 which included a period referred to as the Great Persecution – the last and most severe persecution of Christians by the Roman Empire. It was a time of intolerance and brutality that extended well beyond the Christian community. It was with this life experience in a very troubled time in history that Usebius was led to pen these words.

I was struck with the realization that the focus of the prayer is not directed toward the behavior of others – something that the voices of anger always seem to reflect today in the public arena. The message of this prayer is this - If each of us consistently displays these personal qualities, the world will be transformed for the better.

It recognizes the truth that real

change in the world does not happen when we try to reform the behavior of everyone else to conform to our expectations. Positive change is only possible if it begins within each of us.



The sentiments expressed in this prayer remain good advice centuries later, and if taken to heart, can help us to become a better leader and the kind of healthy and happy person where compassion resides. Instead of being disheartened by the angry words and harsh rhetoric of others or becoming an angry or disillusioned soul, we should work to extend the good feelings that abound in times of tragedy into a new normal in our everyday life. This lofty goal may be hard to achieve in an imperfect world, but it is certainly worth the effort.

Blessings,

Steve



Reflections on Leadership



Leadership in Times of Tragedy

November 2017

The past several months have been marked by a number of events that are accurately described as tragedies. Hurricanes in Texas, Florida and Puerto Rico, the mass shooting in Las Vegas, and the wildfires in the western states of Montana and California are combined into a string of events that is unparalleled in my memory. Some of these are called “natural disasters” while others reflect premeditated, evil intent directed toward an innocent population. Seeing each of these situations on the television screen leaves an indelible mark on each of us, especially if children or the elderly are involved.



As hard as the images are to see on television, the effects of tragedy can be much more difficult when viewed up close. Knowing people in Houston and Florida can turn the abstract image on a television screen into worry and sadness about people we know and love. Everyone at PSL experienced a sense of loss when we discovered that one of the victims of the Las Vegas shootings was a close family member to a PSL staff person. Empathy is unavoidable when we



know the names and families of those who are in the middle of such horrendous situations.

In these circumstances we naturally turn to leaders as we try to come to grips with events that caused such disasters and try to understand what is being done to help those who are most severely affected. Starting with the emergency response, the collective expressions of grief, the investigation of how and why something happened, to the steps taken to prevent a similar situation happening in the future, leadership is critical to recovering from the trauma. Sometimes leaders are captured on camera, sometimes they are invisible, but they are there nonetheless.

Some time ago I had the opportunity to watch the movie Lincoln, which highlighted a short period of time in the life of Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of the United States. From the film and the books I have read on the life of Lincoln, it is my opinion that there is no leader in the history of our country that had to deal with the combination of personal

loss and tragedy in his work life as this remarkable man. The battle reports of the civil war chronicled over 600,000 American deaths on both sides of the conflict. The awareness that his decisions could result in the death of thousands of others was always in his thoughts, especially as he visited with soldiers who were wounded on the battlefield. In the middle of this national tragedy, he suffered the loss of his young son to typhoid fever – a loss so profound that he and his wife, Mary Todd Lincoln, never fully recovered. The strength of his character in the face of such hardship is one of the greatest stories in the history of leadership.

If we are lucky, our leadership skills will never be tested in any truly horrific event, either behind the scenes or in front of a podium filled with microphones and television cameras. But make no mistake, horrible things happen every day, and sometimes they can happen close to us, at work or in our neighborhood. It is more likely to experience a car accident, debilitating medical condition, or the sudden death of



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a friend or co-worker than a history making calamity. Some of these things have happened within the Presbyterian Senior Living family over the years.

What are we to do if we find ourselves in a position of leadership when a tragedy occurs close to us? I have a few observations that may be helpful:

- Focus on people first. Things can be fixed or replaced.
- Resist the impulse to try to explain the unexplainable. It is not up to you to try to sort out circumstances that appear to be entirely senseless.
- Do not divert attention from the immediate needs of people to look for someone or something to blame, especially in the immediate aftermath of a tragedy when the facts may be unclear. There will be ample time later on for detailed analysis and to determine accountability.
- Avoid platitudes. Giving someone a hug and saying nothing is far more comforting than empty words.
- Don't say that you know how someone else feels. Even if you have had a similar experience, everyone reacts differently.
- Be human enough to grieve with those who are grieving. The absence of emotion does not engender respect. On the contrary, keeping a stiff upper lip may appear to be cold and uncaring. There is something reassuring in our shared grief when it helps us to realize that we are not facing the cold hard world alone.

- When in doubt, do something constructive to help. Find the most pressing needs and take action. If possible, enlist others to join you in a concerted effort.
- Sometimes sustained help is needed. Look beyond the immediate rush of the moment to offer ongoing assistance.
- Unless there is an immediate and present danger, avoid making permanent changes when in an emotional state. Long term solutions are best handled with clarity of thought.



We can learn a lot about ourselves and forge stronger bonds with our fellow human beings in difficult situations. We can also gain a fresh perspective on what is important in life. In addition, the strength or weakness of the foundation stones of our lives can be exposed in times of tragedy. When tested, we may be surprised by our strength, or troubled enough by our weakness to make significant changes in the way we live.

Finally, our faith can be strengthened, even when we have no words to express the grief that surrounds us. Faith can be the last refuge in the storm or lift us from the depths of despair.

God of Tears

*God of tears who weeps with us
And holds our trembling hands.
God of fears, embraces us
When we're too weak to stand.*

*God of worried restless nights
Has eyes that never sleep.
God of sorrow, sighs with us
When visited by grief.*

*The times when we are most alone
Is when He is most near.
And when we are engulfed by fog,
His vision crystal clear.*

*God's with us in each darkened hour
And suffers every loss.
Because He gave up heaven's realms
For nails upon a cross.*

Blessings,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, likely belonging to Stephen Proctor.

Reflections on Leadership



Leaving a Legacy

December 2017

Entire books are written about leaving a legacy behind when passing the mantle of leadership to a new generation of leaders. Some of these accounts are written by the individual leader in a effort to put a positive spin on history. From my perspective, the more accurate descriptions of a leader's legacy are written by those he or she may have worked closely with after a bit of time has elapsed. The perspective of time reveals the lasting impact of their work.

Over twenty years ago my friend and mentor Al Schartner retired from his job as CEO of Presbyterian Senior Living. His recent death at age 86 has caused me to think about his legacy as a leader and the effect he has had on the lives of thousands of people during his career.

First there are the facts. Al began his service to Presbyterian Homes in 1964 as assistant administrator to Bill Swaim, the organization's first chief executive. In 1969 he succeeded Bill as CEO, and served until his retirement in 1996. During Al's tenure with Presbyterian Homes the organization grew from serving 375 residents and 10 facilities with a staff of 40 an annual budget of \$300,000 to serving more than 3,000 residents in 18 locations with a staff of 1,800 and an operating budget of \$28,000,000. But the facts that spell out success leave out the character of the person who made all of this happen. The real flavor of Al's leadership is best

illustrated by a few stories that illustrate his character.

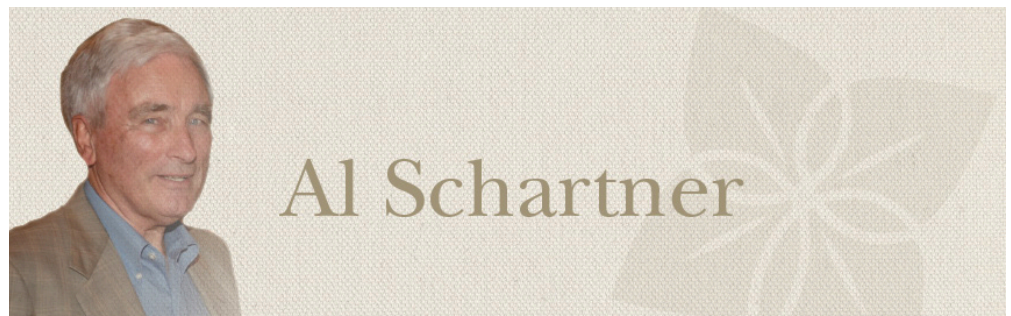
The Ability to Make Friends

Not long after Al moved to Dillsburg he was burning leaves at the edge of his property, and somehow the fire got away from him and ignited the grass on the field next door. This resulted in quite a commotion as the fire department arrived and the neighbors gathered to watch the fire being extinguished. As he was telling me this story, my reaction was "Wow. That must have been an embarrassing moment!" To which he responded. "Well it was a bit of an embarrassment, but it really turned out pretty well. In just a few minutes I was able to get to know almost everyone in the neighborhood. A number of the people I met that day have become close friends and have been an important part of our lives. It would have taken much longer to get to know everyone without that fire." Al is the only person in my experience who could see an opportunity to make friends under such unusual conditions. This was not an isolated event. Al was always

looking for opportunities to connect with people, as evidenced by the many people who claimed him as a friend.

A Person of Faith

Al saw the providence of God in everything around him – especially in the everyday events of life. As a young administrator of one of PSL's smallest locations, I was visiting the administrative office reviewing applications for an assistant administrator. The applicant was a person named Loretta Foster. In her cover letter she mentioned that she would be unavailable for an interview for a few days because she was attending a meeting of Presbyterian women at Wilson College. Al suggested that we go to Chambersburg to see if we could find her and interview her together. When we arrived at the college, we were disappointed to learn that the entire group of approximately 200 women were given box lunches and were on a two hour lunch break, dispersed across the entire campus. We were looking for someone that we did not know by sight in an unknown location



who had no idea that we were looking for her. I was ready to leave. Al wanted to wander around a bit. As we walked out of the main building, I noticed that everyone was wearing name tags. I remarked to Al “Wouldn’t it be crazy if the first person we meet has a name tag that says, “Hello, My name is Loretta Foster?” In less than 50 feet, we passed a lovely lady who had a name tag that said “Hello, My name is Loretta Foster.”

We decided to take Miss Foster to lunch at the local Howard Johnson’s. When Miss Foster was in the restroom, Al quietly asked me if I had any money. Between us we had \$2.00, and the restaurant did not take credit cards. When Miss Foster returned she told Al that she would prefer to eat the box lunch from the meeting, if we did not mind. With a straight face, Al said “Of course not. Steve and I were just thinking of having a cup of coffee”. After paying the bill and leaving a modest tip, we had ten cents to spare. In the car on the way home I remarked at our extraordinary luck. We had located the candidate we were looking for, the interview had gone well, and we were spared the embarrassment of admitting that we did not have enough money to



buy lunch. Al just smiled and said, “Providential”. It was an expression that I heard on many occasions in our 25 years of working together. Al was acutely aware of the providence of God in all things.



The Power of Encouragement

I came to work at PSL in 1971 as a registered nurse with a lot of youthful enthusiasm and very little experience. Looking back on it, I would not have hired me for a position of responsibility. I had a great affection for older persons and a good rapport with my co-workers. But I had a very modest view of my future potential, especially since Rhonda and I had initial career thoughts that were focused on going into the mission field. Shortly after coming to work for PSL, Al and his wife Kathy visited us for dinner at our small apartment. During our evening together, Al mentioned that I should think about my education and the need to eventually obtain a master’s degree in preparation for major responsibility in the field of aging services. When they left, I remember remarking to Rhonda, “I have been working here for less than 6 months and need 60 credits to get a bachelor’s degree, and he is talking about a master’s degree and a big future. Either this guy is a lot smarter than I am or he is nuts!” This turned out to be the first of many seeds of encouragement that changed my perspective, and altered the course of my life. In the 25 years we worked together, Al was always quick

to notice my initiative and frequently went out of his way to point out my accomplishments to others. I was only one of many who would see a world filled with opportunity because of Al’s encouragement.

There are many other stories that reveal the character of Al Schartner and his legacy. His passion for serving older persons, his kindness toward those around him, leading by example, and his natural tendency toward servant leadership are just a few other characteristics that immediately come to mind.



Al left PSL with a great legacy on which to build. Even 20 years after his retirement, the organization that PSL has become still bears the fingerprints of the culture that he nurtured in his time as PSL’s leader. This is a legacy that anyone would be happy to claim as their life’s work. How can I summarize Al Schartner’s influence on my life and PSL’s ministry? The word that immediately comes to mind is “Providential”.