Reflections on Leadership

PRESBYTERIAN SENIOR LIVING

At the end of the year, every business enterprise is faced with the challenge of closing its books. The normal process of getting the invoices from vendors into the accounting system is extended, and areas where expenses are incurred but not yet accounted for require accurate estimates and accruals. It is important that this process is done well, because the beginning of a new period of fiscal measurement requires a fresh start. Failure to begin with a clean slate will mean that in the next year a lot of precious time will be wasted on looking backward to explain variances caused by expenses incurred in an earlier time period when the focus and measurement of progress should be based on current activity. Holding on to left over baggage from the past can distort the present and cripple the best intentions to move ahead.

There is an important life lesson to be learned from this business reality. The New Year is a great time to leave the past behind and start fresh. This approach extends beyond the idea of New Year's resolutions to lose weight, exercise more, lead a more disciplined life, and pay more attention to the needs of family and friends. The idea of a fresh start has a strong emotional component as well. I believe that two of the most liberating New Year's resolutions involve forgiving others and shedding the burden of regret.

One of the most extraordinary stories of the intersection of forgiveness and regret is illustrated in the New York Times best seller, *Picking Cotton, Our memoir of Injustice and Redemption.* It is the true story of two individuals - Jennifer Thompson and Ronald Cotton. Their story begins in 1984.

Jennifer Thompson was a 22 year old white student at Elon College in North Carolina. One night someone broke into her apartment while she slept and raped her at knifepoint. It was a prolonged ordeal, and the face of her attacker was burned into her memory. She escaped and eventually was able to identify Ronald Cotton as her attacker, both from a photo and picking him out of a lineup of 7 men.

Ron was a local man in his early 20's with a limited education, working at a local food service establishment. He was African American, and had a juvenile history that made him a logical suspect. He closely resembled the composite sketch that was circulated by police based on Jennifer's recollection. In the initial interview several days after the attack, Ron was confused about where he was on the night in question, so the alibi provided by the family later was discounted. A piece of foam rubber from the crime scene was consistent with the tennis shoes that Ron was wearing.

It was discovered that another middle aged woman in the same community was also raped on the same night. She could not initially identify the face of her attacker, but she could provide a general description that matched Ron's profile. The circumstances were so similar that it was believed that both attacks had been perpetrated by the same individual.

While there was no physical evidence to prove that Ron was at either of the crime scenes, he was convicted of both crimes, based largely on Jennifer's eyewitness testimony. She was absolutely certain that Ron was the one. Jennifer appeared in court every day to make sure that her attacker was brought to justice. The police and prosecutors were convinced that Ron was the criminal they were looking for and did not believe Ron when he insisted that he was innocent. He was sentenced to two life terms in prison plus 54 years.

Jennifer eventually got married, had triplets, and her life regained some semblance of balance. But she could never forgive Ron for what he had

done to her. Eleven years later, with the advent of DNA testing, it was discovered that someone else had committed the crimes. The other individual (who closely resembled Ron, but was several inches shorter) confessed, and Ron was a free man.

Everything was turned upside down. Jennifer, who could not forgive Ron for the horrible crime that he had committed against her, now had to face the reality that her misidentification had caused someone to be wrongly incarcerated for 11 years. Overwhelmed with guilt and regret, she became the one in need of forgiveness. Eventually they met in what could only be described as an emotional reunion. Ron's words to Jennifer were comforting. *"I forgive you. I'm not angry at you… All I want is for us all to go on and have a happy life."*

These were Jennifer's words after the meeting:

"I don't think that until I stood week-kneed in front of Ron that I had any idea of what forgiveness was, or how powerful it could be. Ron gave me…the gift of forgiveness – not because I deserved it, but because that is what grace is about. Forgiveness is tricky. People think that when you forgive someone that you excuse what he (or she) did. That is not what it is. It is about power and letting go."

Rereading the story again, I was struck by what a heroic figure Ron Cotton was – a person unfettered by the bonds of bitterness and regret. His ability to forgive his accuser enabled

Jennifer to let go of the guilt and regret that could have destroyed her life.

How does shedding the dual burdens of an unforgiving spirit and regret relate to leadership?

First of all, constantly reminding others on your team of previous mistakes can cause them to live in the past and keep them focused on regret instead of moving ahead. Once you have learned all you can from an unsuccessful situation, exercise your power to let it go. Failure to forgive can only damage relationships undermine trust, and depress morale.

Secondly, learning from past decisions that did not work out well is essential. Those who ignore the lessons of the past are condemned to relive them. But being preoccupied with failure and wallowing in regret can diminish a leader's effectiveness by making future decisions slower and more tentative. Such behavior is, by its very nature, unsafe. Just imagine yourself riding in a car where the driver is completely focused on the rear view mirror. When faced with other speeding vehicles and road hazards, this pattern of behavior is an accident just waiting to happen.

Ultimately the freedom from the burden of regret and bitterness requires both giving and accepting forgiveness. Forgive others, forgive yourself, and move on.

The only way I can make sense of the connection between forgiving others and being forgiven is through the realization that every human being is imperfect. We are all fallen people forgiven by the grace of God. The Apostle Paul describes it this way in the book of Romans, chapter 3 – *"For everyone has sinned; we all fall short*

of God's glorious standard. Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty of our sins". Paul continues in the book of Colossians, chapter 3 *"Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others (NLT)."*

Our baggage in life may extend well beyond forgiveness and regret. In his book *Traveling Light, Releasing the Burdens You Were Never Intended to Bear*, Max Lucado asks the question, "Have you been known to pick up a few bags?" He identifies guilt, discontent, anxiety, grief, perfectionism, loneliness, and fear as heavy burdens that we all carry.

So, this is the choice for each of us in the New Year. Will we continue to carry the baggage of years gone by, or will we be traveling light? I know what my old accounting professor would say. Close the books and start the New Year with a clean balance sheet.

Blessings,

Reflections on Leadership

PRESBYTERIAN SENIOR LIVING

Learning from Failure

When I was working my way through nursing school I had the opportunity to work as a 3-11 chauffer and personal assistant for Cecil Runyan, the CEO and Board Chair of Southeastern Michigan Gas Company. It was a great job for a person working their way through college as I could study in between my various duties. As an 18 year old college student I spent a great deal of time with this 80 year old, cigar chomping, benevolent autocrat. The unexpected blessing was that I had a front row seat to the business world and the philosophical musings of a truly colorful character. Seeing me as the young and impressionable person that I was, in one of many reflective moments we spent together he gave me the following advice: "Young man, if someone offers to give you a million dollars, don't take it. It is a lot more fun to make it yourself." At the time I responded, "Great. Tell me how you came to that conclusion." What followed was a story of how he started with very little and made and lost 2 fortunes before his current success. While I am not sure that the failures that he described were the "fun" part of making it yourself, it was clear to me that the narrative of his failures played an important part of the way he viewed success.

In the many years that have passed since that original discussion, I have come to realize that there are more life changing lessons to be found in failure than in stories of a smashing success. Many of the stories of great success have deep roots in some kind of failure that inspired radical and transformative change. There are examples from Politics (Lincoln, FDR); Literature (Stephen King, J. K. Rowling of *Harry Potter* fame; Entertainment – (Walt Disney); Food (Milton Hershey, Harlan Sanders of Kentucky Fried Chicken); and Manufacturing (Henry Ford and the failed Detroit Automobile Company). It seems that examples of rising from failure to success can be found everywhere. Furthermore, the history of almost every successful company includes periods of major challenges that punctuate the story behind the success of the moment. It is my belief that any leader who hopes to succeed must study failure.
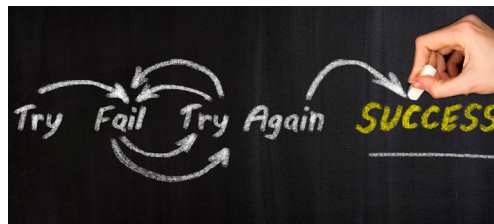
How does failure happen? I like Ernest Hemmingway's insight taken from the dialogue between two characters in *The Sun Also Rises*. *"How did you go bankrupt?" "Two ways. Gradually, then suddenly."* There is a profound truth in this observation. In most cases, failure is not the result of one big blunder. Usually there are a series of events (which can be either the result of action or inaction) that lead up to what we would call a failure. Most of the popular literature likes to focus on the spectacular failure because it is very entertaining. The reality is that failure comes in all shapes and sizes, and it would be a mistake to think that if we can just avoid the most horrendous errors, that we will experience success. There are, however a number of leading indicators that seem to occur prior to failure. What are some of the danger signs that would suggest that failure is on the horizon? Character issues in leadership often precede failure.

In his book, *How the Mighty Fall*, Jim Collins identifies *"hubris born of success"* (something we commonly refer to as pride) as the first step in failure. Of course this is not a new or startling discovery. More than 1500 years ago, St. Augustine described the dangers of pride, calling pride - *"the love of one's own excellence".* Chapter 16 of the ancient book of Proverbs puts it this way – *"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."* But we know that pride is not always bad. John Maxwell describes two kinds of pride. Good pride represents our dignity and self-respect. Bad pride is the deadly sin of superiority that reeks of conceit and arrogance. It would appear that the heady experience of success provides the seed of pride that can blossom into failure. The stages that follow Collins' "hubris born of success" are the "undisciplined pursuit of more" and "denial of risk and peril". Those are the leading indicators. Everything that Collins describes after that is a downhill run – what he calls "grasping for salvation, capitulation, and irrelevance and death" is a downward spiral that few survive.

Pride is only one of many character issues in leadership that ultimately result in a breakdown of trust. Trust is the glue that keeps an organization together. The absence of trust is extremely corrosive, and most often shows itself in an aversion to take risk and move forward with confidence, and can sink the best conceived strategy imaginable.

Generally there are two overarching causes of failure:

- Lack of Leadership / vision – failure to anticipate the future.

- Poor execution – consistently tending to the details of delivering service on a day to day basis.

Many of the writers who study leadership have tended to over romanticize the "vision" side of the equation and underappreciate the role of "execution". There seems to be an implied magic in a brilliantly conceived strategy. If that was true, then why do some organizations fail when they have a great strategy? John Cotter, author and expert on the subject of change, has observed that *"Strong leadership with weak management is no better, and is sometimes actually worse than the reverse."* It would appear that the only way to ensure success or avoid failure is to match a clear vision with solid day to day execution.

There is a powerful connection between how an organization views failure and its ability to innovate and adapt. In this context failure can be viewed from a number of perspectives that describe how an organization views failure and risk in general:

- Level I – Avoid failure at all costs. Little or no innovation or change occurs in these environments.

- Level II – Embrace risk. Creative ideas are encouraged and supported. Innovation followed by failure is not punished, and those who fail are encouraged to continue to try new things.

- Level III - Use failure as a learning opportunity. Celebrate the failure and follow up with a thorough analysis – not to affix blame, but to extract the lessons of strategy and execution that will improve the probability of success in the next venture or situation.

- Level IV - Expect and embrace failure. Progress and failure are expected to occur together as a part of the process of moving forward. In the book Decisive, How to Make Better Choices in Life and Work – Chip Heath and Dan Heath talk about preparing to be wrong, and establishes what they call "tripwires" to avoid autopilot and when to make a decision to change course is both insightful and practical. More recently Eric Ries book The Lean Startup studies the connection between failure and innovation. The approach to build, measure, and learn (in that order) when creating new products not only expects failure, but embraces failure as essential in creating a cheaper and more effective process by creating pivot points to move forward when failure occurs.

Not long ago I took two of my grandchildren to see the Last Jedi – the latest Star Wars movie. In this movie, the ever wise Yoda proclaims that *"The greatest teacher, failure is."* This is an accurate statement. It has been my experience that the willingness to successfully embrace significant change comes from two primary sources – inspiration or desperation. Unfortunately most people and organizations occupy the deadly space in between and just muddle through. Experiencing failure can produce both inspiration and/or desperation, overpowering complacency to reach new heights.
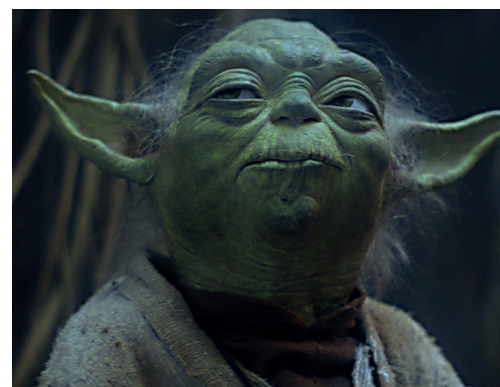
So what was the key learning from the conversation with my 80 year old business Yoda over 45 years ago? That one must understand the role of failure as a part of becoming a successful person. Life is rarely, if ever, limited to a collection of success stories. More often it is how the combination of success and failure has shaped you into the person you are today and the person that you aspire to become in the future. No one has yet offered to give me a million dollars, so that part of the lesson remains untested.

Blessings,

Reflections on Leadership

PRESBYTERIAN SENIOR LIVING

Integrity In Leadership

March 2018

Integrity is the cornerstone of all human relationships. Integrity is also the central ingredient in trust, honesty, credibility, self-control, courage, and a host of other virtues that we ascribe to great leaders. The absence of integrity is a fatal leadership weakness. But if integrity is such an essential element in human relationships and the behavior and attitudes of leaders, why does it seem to be lacking in so many situations in modern life?

Over 10 years ago Marianne Jennings wrote the book **The Seven Signs of Ethical Collapse**. As an attorney and a professor of business ethics, she describes the fall of Enron, Tyco, Health South, WorldCom, Adelphia, Sunbeam and many others, and the horrific behavior of their leadership that resulted in criminal prosecution and the loss of millions (sometimes billions) of dollars. She uses the terms pressure, fear, hubris, weakness, a false sense of goodness and unusual innovation as the tools unethical leaders use to wreak misery and destruction on those unsuspecting souls around them.

In the years since the book was published, the litany of ethical lapses has continued. The sorry state of ethical behavior is not limited to the executive suites of the largest business enterprises. It is found everywhere – including education, engineering, pharmacy, medicine, and sports.

- In 2011 an investigation by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation found that 44 out of 56 schools cheated on the 2009 Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests. 178 teachers and principals were found to have corrected answers entered by students.

- In 2015 it was discovered that Volkswagen manipulated its programming to deliver false emissions data on its diesel engines to satisfy federal standards. The deception involved intentional behavior on the part of many highly trained engineers and decision makers.

- In 2017 John Kapoor, a billionaire pharmacist whose company developed a liquid version of the opioid painkiller fentanyl, was arrested in Phoenix on charges that he spearheaded a scheme to bribe doctors and pharmacists across the nation to boost sales — largely to patients who did not need the medication.

- In recent days Michigan State's former director of sports and former Olympic gymnastics team doctor, Larry Nasser has been convicted of sexual assault of scores of women, including several Team USA gymnasts. As the investigation continues, institutional behavior at Michigan State University – including a pattern of ignoring complaints of the victims is at the heart of the scandal.

The lack of integrity can be found almost everywhere, and most of the time it never reaches the front page of the newspaper. But the problem of integrity has an even darker side than we would like to admit. The human condition predisposes us to recognize and call out the faults of others, while completely missing our own ethical lapses. Jesus' words are convicting to everyone who is concerned about integrity. *"Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye."* (Luke 6:41-42, ESV). The first lesson of integrity is that it is best applied through a process of self-examination.

What is Integrity and how can we recognize it when we see it? Webster defines integrity in 3 ways:

- Firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values (sometimes referred to as incorruptibility).

- An unimpaired condition (soundness- as in structural integrity).

- The quality or state of being complete or undivided (completeness).

Most of us think of the first definition when we think of integrity, but incorruptible, unimpaired, and undivided is a pretty good description of the characteristics that most people would like to see in a leader.

From my perspective, the question of how a person can examine their own ethical tendencies is not that difficult. A person can measure their own integrity by answering a few simple questions:

- What you do, or are willing to do, when you are convinced that no one else is looking?

- How do you behave when you believe you have an advantage over another person?

- Will you tell the truth, even when it does not place you in the most positive light?

- Will you do the honest thing, even when it cost you more than you could otherwise get away with?

When it comes to the practical application of integrity in the daily performance of our duties a number of other questions emerge:

- How do we handle a difficult customer? Do we respond to their request or just try to placate them with empty promises?

- Are our dealings with vendors above reproach? Do we play favorites instead of going for the best product at the best price?

- What do you do when you see a friend violate a rule? Do you simply look the other way?

- Do you publicly support a work rule or policy but privately fail to enforce it?

Often as leaders, the foundations of integrity begin with who we hire and how we discipline people. Starting with a person whose values demonstrate integrity is a must. In my experience as a leader, I have regretted every occasion when I have hired someone when I had lingering questions about their integrity.

Another frequent difficulty arises when someone of great talent and ability suffers a lapse of integrity that leads to their discharge from employment. In the termination process the question is often raised "Doesn't my superior performance entitle me to a break?" Of course the answer is no. Admittedly it is easier to discharge a sluggard who lacks integrity, but talent cannot be a substitute for honesty.

Where does integrity come from – what is its source? Some people have suggested that there are universal principles of integrity that cross cultural boundaries. I am not knowledgeable enough to make that kind of sweeping generalization. I do know that integrity rarely survives without being anchored to something outside of human reasoning. This is because the human mind has an amazing ability to rationalize almost every kind of behavior. Even in the above examples there were attempts to shift blame for terrible behavior. Cheating on test scores was understandable given pressure caused by the unrelenting focus on test results. Bypassing emissions testing standards was due to the pressure to meet consumer performance expectations and increase sales. Sexual abuse? How could college officials be certain that the complaints of impressionable young women were valid? The reason given for some of the most horrible crimes in history has been "I was just following orders".

If we cannot trust ourselves or the shifting standards of society, the anchor for integrity must lie elsewhere. In faith based organizations like Presbyterian Senior Living, integrity comes from our Judeo-Christian roots. Jennings calls these "Virtue Standards… the application of absolute values". The teachings of the Old and New Testaments clearly state standards of right and wrong behavior, and expectations of justice, mercy, and kindness that have been regarded as virtue standards for thousands of years. How is this approach different from human reasoning? Jennings puts it this way, "Rather than seeking a justification for a desired outcome, the decision maker determines the outcome by honoring values first, not the outcome."

Finally, any discussion on integrity is tempered by the realization that we all fall short of perfection. However, when it comes to integrity, we are faced with a fairly simple choice – What kind of person do I want to be? Will I be able to respect myself if I lack integrity in my relationships with others?

Reflections on Leadership

Relationships

My favorite story of the discovery of the complexity of relationships comes from an experience I had with my grandson, Ben when he was 5 years old. After spending the morning fishing together at a local farm pond he asked if we could stop at the Dairy Queen for ice cream on the way home. Being a typical over indulgent grandparent, I decided it was a great idea, even though it was less than an hour before lunch. I ordered an ice cream cone, and Ben ordered a large chocolate brownie sundae - a huge undertaking for a little kid. While he devoured the ice cream I asked him what we should tell his mother when we returned home and she asked if he was ready for lunch. He simply replied, "She won't ask, and I won't say anything." I suggested that we get our story straight, but he was insistent.

Sitting next to me in the front seat of the car on the way back to the house, I could see that my grandson was deep in thought. After some time, he turned to me and said, "My mom is your daughter." "Yes she is", I replied. He brightened up and exclaimed "We don't have to worry about the ice cream, because she can't tell you what to do! You could even put her in a time out chair if you wanted to!"

I tried to explain to him that while he got the basics of the relationship right, it wasn't quite that straightforward.

As we entered the house, my daughter, Michelle (his mom) said, "Ben, what would you like for lunch?" As he looked at me with a pained expression, I quickly said, "I took him to the Dairy Queen, and it will be a couple of hours before he is going to want anything else to eat." She turned to my grandson and said, "Ben, you can go and play, your grandfather and I need to talk." Ben smiled and quickly ran off.

That was the day that my grandson got his first exposure to the power and complexity of relationships. He learned two things. In spite of his understanding of the organizational chart of our family, his mom was really the one in charge. Secondly, the accountability for his behavior could be partially deflected to the senior officer on deck (grandfather), whose formal position provided him with some protection from the consequences of what they had done. This knowledge has been used in a variety of situations over the years.

We know from experience within our families that relationships are complicated. In many ways relationships with our work families are as complicated and vital to a satisfying life. Furthermore, healthy personal relationships are increasingly important for any organization that strives for excellence in a fast paced and changing world.

In his book **One Mission, How Leaders Build a Team of Teams**, Chris Fussell describes an equation for what he called an "aligning narrative" for General Stanley McChrystal's Special Operations Task Force. This equation was used to unify teams with very different cultures into a singularly focused mission.

The goal of this narrative was to eliminate excessive bureaucracy, create connections outside the normal chain of command, establish networks to improve collaboration, and encourage autonomy from a decision making perspective. While the military overtones in the book can make the message a bit harder to translate into everyday life, the simplicity of the equation has a ring of truth that can be applied anywhere:

Credibility = proven competence + integrity + relationships

Fussell's message is that credibility is the glue that bonds disparate teams together. Of the three ingredients needed to establish credibility, the most frequently ignored is relationships. Creating networks, collaboration, and overcoming bureaucracy to foster autonomy in decision making requires building strong relationships. He cites a number of examples where organizations have possessed proven competence and integrity and failed to achieve their objectives.
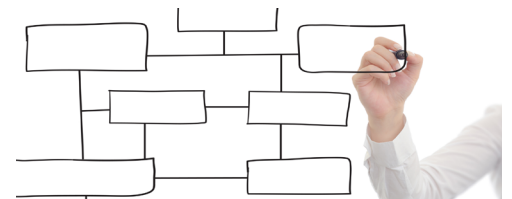
The truth is that every organization is teeming with formal and informal relationships. Formal relationships are easier to understand, as they are defined by titles and organizational charts. However, an organizational chart rarely presents a complete picture of the way things actually work. Informal

relationships, which are often more affected by personal and social factors, are harder to discern, but their role is critical, even in the presence of a well-defined hierarchy.

One of the central skills of leadership is figuring out how to forge positive work relationships, especially with people over whom you have little formal authority. In most organizations, titles have been losing the ability to command outcomes, while relationships have become increasingly more important. A reputation for fairness, honesty, respect for the opinions of others, and willingness to find areas of compromise in seeking solutions to common problems can be a tremendous advantage, especially when the edges of title and position power become dull and unable to cut through dense organizational undergrowth. But reputation can only take you so far. Lasting relationships are the result of direct personal contact and experience.

There are those who contend that building relationships is harder at this time than in previous generations. Simon Sinek's outstanding YouTube video on *Millennials in the Workplace* offers surprising insights into how the use of modern technology has become a barrier in the development of workplace relationships. He contends that authentic relationships are constructed through a process he describes as slow, arduous, and difficult, often occurring in the quiet moments around simple expressions of care and concern. Modern technology, like cell phones, can fill up every spare moment and leave little room for those

spontaneous occasions where bonding between human beings can occur.

What are the practical benefits of strong relationships in the work place?

- Relationships are the basis for establishing trust between individuals to encourage risk taking. The absence of trust results in "defensive decision making" that can slow progress down to a crawl.

- Relationships provide a sense of security that is the foundation for an open exchange of information and ideas. An honest and timely opinion from a co-worker just might help to avoid the kind of embarrassing mistake that we all have made at one time or another in our work lives.

- Crossing formal organizational boundaries to find solutions and respond more quickly is crucial to good customer service. One of my good friends, John Riewer, calls this a transformational process going from "silos to circles".

- Sharing personal and professional dreams and aspirations can become the springboard for higher performance, inspiring the team to reach beyond solving immediate problems to achieving excellence.

- A sterile or antiseptic work place can never be personally fulfilling, no matter how lofty the overall goals of the organization. Relationships are the key to humanizing the work environment and improving job satisfaction.

What steps can a leader take to develop positive relationships within their work environment? In his book, The Fred Factor, Mark Sanborn identifies something he calls the seven B's of relationship building:

- Be real. Always do your best at being yourself.

- Be interested (not just interesting). People are flattered when you express an interest in getting to know them better in an effort to serve them more effectively.

- Be a better listener. This will give you important practical information you can use to create value.

- Be empathetic. The need to be understood is one of the highest human needs.

- Be honest. Don't make promises you can't keep, or create expectations you cannot fulfill.

- Be helpful. Little things make a big difference.

- Be prompt. Helping people save time by being prompt and efficient is a gift of great value.

I would like to add one other dimension to the list. – Be Open. Don't be afraid to share something of yourself with others. Before you can be respected as a leader, you first need to connect with your co-workers on a human level, which is the common foundation for all relationships.

Cultivating relationships in the work place can be time consuming and messy. But without this key ingredient, the recipe for credibility and the benefits that follow will never be achieved.

Blessings,

Reflections on Leadership

PRESBYTERIAN
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Figuring Out What to Keep

May 2018

Like many people who have spent their lives residing in colder climates, spring has traditionally been a time for cleaning and reorganizing. I start to get up earlier in the morning to do things outside before I leave for work. Some would call it spring fever, but I seem to have a lot more energy when the weather improves. My wife, Rhonda thinks my burst of energy is "seasonal hyperactivity" (compared to my normal hyperactivity). In addition to cleaning up the yard I begin to take a serious look at the garage and basement, finding inspiration to do what my mom always called "spring cleaning".

Spring cleaning is not just about rearranging things. At our house spring cleaning is an activity that we do together because we have differing ideas about what we should keep and what should be thrown away in the spring cleaning process. Some of Rhonda's treasures are the kind of things that I would throw away first if I was left on my own. She, on the other hand fails to grasp the value of a stray piece of lumber or Mason jar full of nuts and bolts that just might

be useful someday. It is always interesting to see how the art of compromise works when faced with the decision of what to keep and what to throw away. To make matters worse, in this season of our lives we are trying to get rid of stuff that has been in storage for some time. Since our children now have homes and families of their own, we have transferred things like wedding dresses, baseball trophies, and other family treasures to its' rightful owner, or thrown it away as instructed.

In addition, when you get to a certain age the struggle to simplify is a topic of discussion that stretches well past the time of spring cleaning. A recent Wall Street Journal article was entitled "Your Kids Do Not Want Your Stuff". The story was about individuals facing retirement and looking to downsize their living accommodations, thinking that the things they have accumulated would have value to their children, only to discover that Aunt Mable's silver tea set was not wanted by the next generation of family members. As tastes change, the items passed down from one generation to another seem to have less and less value.

One of our big problems is books. We have a fairly large collection of all kinds of books. Some have pages that have been underlined so we could return to a favorite passage, rendering them useless to others. My guess is that they will have to be thrown away or donated, but the process will take several days, and the attention of both of us to make those final decisions.

Figuring out what to keep and what to throw away is a question for every organization that exists in a changing environment. We all know that some things are intended to be used and discarded while others are organizational heirlooms that are treasured for generations. The difficulty with organizational "spring cleaning" is that deciding what to keep and what to throw away often depends on your point of view. Some organizations
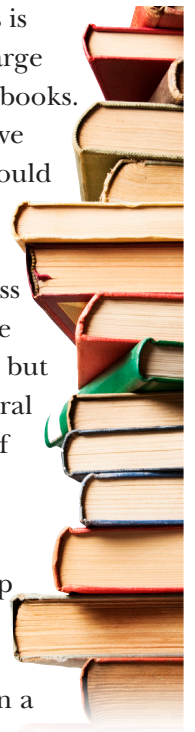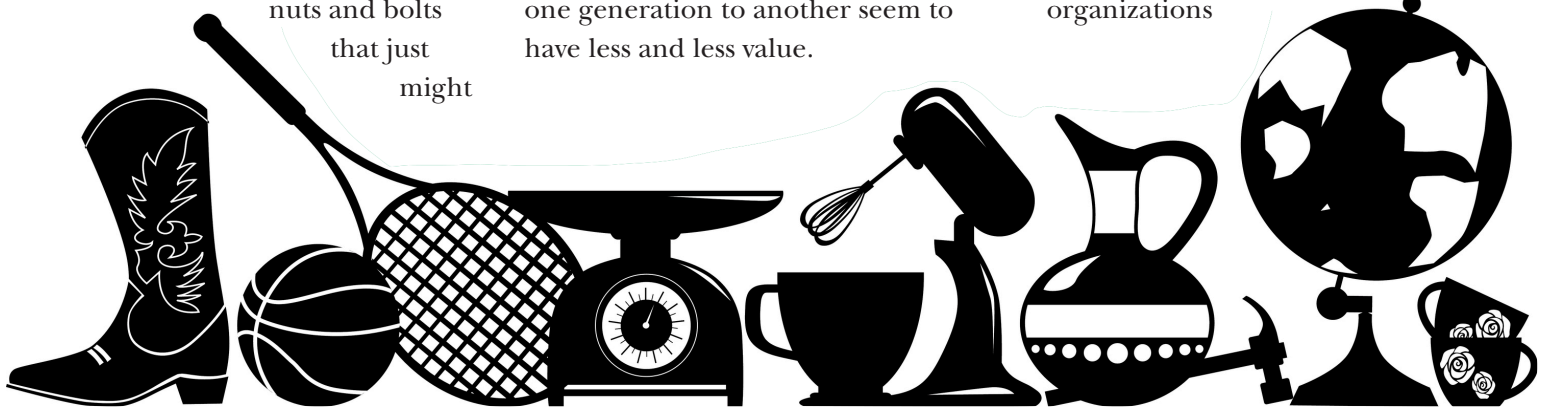
opt to keep everything and are eventually paralyzed by the clutter.

Many years ago I heard from a pastor friend who visited Turkey with a church group. During the tour, they visited a place that specialized in handmade Turkish carpets. These carpets were painstakingly constructed over months and years of an individual's life in order to create just the right design. They were told that the wool carpets that were being made were expected to last about 300 years and the silk carpets that were more densely constructed could last up to 700 years. I am not certain that this is all true or is a marketing pitch, but I was impressed with the durability of anything that could be used for so long.

There are some things about an organization that can and should last for generations. Our mission and values are anchors that give us stability. For Presbyterian Senior Living, our mission represents things that we believe to be nearly timeless – our handmade carpet. It is our sacred responsibility to preserve this heirloom and pass it on to the next generation of leadership. Our stated values provide the most up to date definition of what this mission looks like in our day to day work and are carefully reviewed from time to time to make sure that the mission is being translated into action by everyone on the PSL team.

The methods used to accomplish our mission, however, are changing and must change to succeed in the future. The bricks and mortar that surround the programs we design to serve seniors, age and become obsolete. We need to replace outdated buildings and redesign programs in order to meet the emerging needs and desires of those we serve. It is essential to embrace new technology to provide better service and to become more efficient.

Even the language we use to describe the people we serve and the range of services we provide needs to be continually updated. The first letter sent to me as a new PSL staff member in 1971 was addressed to the "Matron and Inmates of the Presbyterian Home". This is a stark contrast to the PSL lexicon guidelines that support the organization's person centered culture of respect and how we think and express ourselves to and about the people we serve.

As we face a period of transition and embrace the future, the way we approach change becomes even more complicated. Many organizations wait for circumstances to demand a reaction. While a need for change that is imposed by outside forces is relatively easy to explain to staff or an outside constituency, continually playing catch up is dangerous business. Anticipating the future requires more. In his classic

work **Leading Change**, John Kotter identifies an 8 stage process for creating major change:

1. Establishing a sense of urgency
2. Creating a guiding coalition
3. Developing a vision and strategy
4. Communicating the change vision
5. Empowering broad-based action
6. Generating short term wins
7. Consolidating gains and producing more change
8. Anchoring new approaches in the culture

But before an organization can embark on Kotter's change process there needs to be a clear understanding of the difference between the disposable and the timeless. Sometimes it is easy, like the need to change computer hardware and software. Other times it is not so clear – like the policies that define the way we treat residents and staff that raises the question - are we adjusting to new market conditions or sacrificing sacred values?

Boards and staff wrestle with the best ways to gain clarity on these important questions. In my experience these decisions are most effectively accomplished when surrounded by the kind of discussion that may be heard in our garage or basement during spring cleaning. "Honey, can you explain to me again why we can't throw that away? It really doesn't look very valuable to me."

Blessings,

Reflections on Leadership

**PRESBYTERIAN SENIOR LIVING**

Defining Moments - Turning Points

Psychologists often refer to the concept of defining moments – certain events in life that shape the person you have become. These events can be positive or negative, but they play an outsized role in the narrative that a person constructs about what has meaning for them and how they see life. Depending on how these events are recalled, they can result in a person seeing themselves as a lifelong victim of circumstance or serve as a springboard to successfully overcoming obstacles. Sometimes there are significant events that become a common defining moment. Most people of a certain age can tell you where they were when they heard that John Kennedy was assassinated, or when the 9/11 attack occurred. Author Jeffrey Archer has observed that *"There are defining moments in one's life when you learn about yourself, and you deposit that knowledge in the experience account, so you can draw on it at some later date."*

The idea of defining moments coincides with my belief that every one of us has a story that includes important life changing events. The main difference between people is that some of us are more willing to share our story than others. If you doubt that you have a story to tell, think about the following: *Describe an experience or an event that makes you who you are today; or Tell me a story that will help me to understand who you are as a person.* Given a few minutes to reflect on these thoughts, a whole

series of stories will emerge - stories of relationships, loss, opportunities, family, career, and childhood.

My wife, Rhonda often tells me that I have a story for almost everything, and I guess that is mostly true. Reading through the Book of **Reflections on Leadership** you can easily identify many defining moments in my life. The story of my mother locking the door so I would have to face the schoolyard bully, the decision of how to respond to the unjust criticism of a difficult supervisor, the impact of mentors in my life, and the story of how I met the woman who has been the love of my life are just a few of the many personal stories that fill the pages. Each one represents a defining moment in my life.
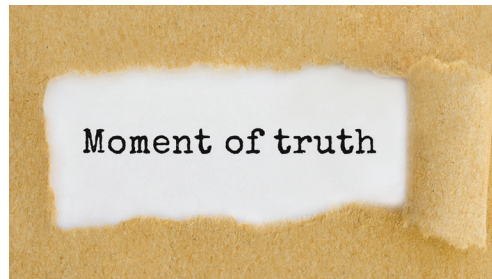
Chip and Dan Heath have written an insightful book called **The Power of Moments** that explores how these moments are created and their impact on each of us. They divided these moments into 4 general areas:

- Moments of elevation – experiences that rise above the every day.

- Moments of insight – positive or negative experiences that deliver a moment of realization or transformation.

- Pride – having a skill recognized by others or having someone who believes in us.

- Connection – social moments when others are present to experience a time of shared meaning.

Some events can fill more than one of the boxes listed above. A graduation from high school or college feel like a rite of passage (elevation), a realization that the next phase of life is filled with opportunity that will bring new challenges (insight), pride over achieving an important goal (recognition), and a celebration that draws families together in a shared social experience (connection).

Moments of insight can come from an intensely painful experience. I heard the story told by a highly successful leader who recounted a childhood marked by an alcoholic and abusive father. The realization that this was a problem that had been passed down from his grandfather and great grandfather led him to a moment of decision. He vowed that this terrible family legacy was going to stop with him, and he was going to be a different kind of father and husband. Thirty years later the fruit of this promise continues in his children and grandchildren.

It would appear that these moments of enlightenment include a pivot of sorts, stepping away from the pain and regret to ask an important question. How can I turn this impactful moment into something positive that may make me a better person? There are many examples of defining moments becoming turning points in a person's life trajectory. Often these turning points have a spiritual dimension.

The Apostle Paul experienced a defining moment in his conversion on the Damascus road when he was struck blind and heard the voice of Jesus. This moment did not lead to an easy and comfortable life. In 2 Corinthians he recounts being beaten and stoned, shipwrecked and adrift at sea, death threats, hunger and thirst, and being exposed to the elements. In spite of all of these hardships, he persevered in his new calling because he was a permanently changed man.

Defining moments can also be intensely positive. Literally every successful person I know has a teacher or mentor story that is highlighted as the key to their personal and professional achievements. Hearing someone tell you that they believe in you and expect great things in the future has the power to sustain a person through many of life's disappointments and challenges.

How do the defining moments of our life story affect the kind of leader that we become? In the book **Geeks and Geezers**, Warren Bennis and Robert Thomas describe what they call the Crucibles of Leadership - difficult situations that help to develop key leadership skills. They particularly identify a trait they call "adaptive capacity" as a key to leadership success. They observe that "People with ample adaptive capacity may struggle with the crucibles they encounter, but they

don't become stuck or defined by them. They learn important lessons, including new skills that allow them to move on to new levels of achievement and new levels of learning." While everyone has defining moments in life, it appears that how we respond to these defining moments is the key to being a successful leader.

Secondly, leaders have frequent opportunities to be part of a defining moment in the life of another person. Giving someone your undivided time and attention teaching or just patiently listening, offering genuine words of praise and recognition for a job well done, encouraging someone who is going through a particularly hard time, or providing a balanced perspective to someone with less life experience are just a few ways leaders can have a great impact on the future.

Leaders can also play a key role in helping their entire team become closer and learn something positive from a work experience. Reminding them of the sacredness that can be found in serving others well and how their work makes the world a better place can create a level of satisfaction that makes it easier to get up and come to work in the morning.

Finally, defining moments are often found in unlikely places. Several years ago I wrote a piece about connecting with my son in the quiet moments

spent fishing. Later, when my Dad read it, he thought I had written it about our times fishing together as adults. An experience that may seem rather pedestrian to others can be incredibly important in building and sustaining relationships.

Fishing Lines

"Got a bite Dad?"
"Just a bump, nothing on the line."
"Seems like we have been around here
Quite a little time."
"A little slow, I must admit;
You never know just when
The fish that we are waiting for
Will come along again."

And so the conversation goes;
Small talk by the hour.
But tucked between the words and silence
Loaded with the power
Of life and love and meaning
Of past and future dreams;
Waiting for the fish to come
And interrupt the scene.

I talk of what has value.
Of lessons I have learned.
He talks of situations
Deciding where to turn.
In years ahead when life unfolds,
The turning of a page,
I hope he asks for my advice,
Believing I'm a sage.

Returning empty handed,
Mom thinks our luck was bad.
But the day was worth the trip;
Fishing lines with Dad.

Blessings,

Reflections on Leadership

PRESBYTERIAN
SENIOR LIVING

Hope Revisited - the Case for Optimism

July 2018

In May of 2016 I wrote a reflection on Leadership and Hope, and how leaders cultivate hope in themselves and those around them in their daily work. Hope is an essential ingredient in leadership, because hopeless people generally lack the energy and purpose to inspire others to move together in a positive direction. Since that time I have been thinking a lot about optimism, which the Oxford Dictionary defines as Hopefulness and confidence about the future or the success of something.

Optimism can be both hard to come by and life giving when it is present. My wife Rhonda and daughter Michelle are both cancer survivors (14 and 6 years respectively). In my daughter's case, her treatment required a stem cell transplant. As any cancer survivor will tell you, there are many moments where maintaining sense of optimism is nearly impossible. Spending weeks in an isolation room is a particularly difficult challenge. In a situation like this, the confidence and optimism of the physician and hospital staff is critical to the healing process. One of the ways the hospital staff conveyed a sense of optimism to us was in the form of a graph on the wall that illustrated the path that would be followed in the days ahead. Daily blood work was compared to the graph, with white blood counts reaching zero and rebounding after the transplant. When we asked what would happen if the stem cells taken from my daughter's body did not reproduce new white blood cells after the transfusion, the

response was, "We see this every day. It will work as planned." Looking back on the experience, those words of encouragement and faith in God enabled our family to get through a very difficult time.

It might just be my imagination, but it seems to be harder to maintain a sense of optimism these days. A number of my friends and acquaintances have remarked that they spend less time listening to the news because of the negative tone of nearly every news report. The trend toward negativity is not just a liberal or conservative issue. Negativity and pessimism can be found everywhere, and its effects can be corrosive to the spirit.

That is why a recent book by noted author Greg Easterbrook caught my eye. Even the title was a breath of fresh air – **It's Better Than It Looks, Reasons for Optimism in an Age of Fear.**

In the preface of the book he observes that while optimism has gone out of style, the facts do not support the doom and gloom of the general climate. Easterbrook does not ignore the problems of the day, but the evidence for optimism is compelling:

- In the 1960's mass starvation was predicted, and millions (perhaps billions) would die of hunger. Instead, by 2015 the United Nations reported that global malnutrition had declined to the lowest level in history.

- In the 1970's it was forecast that petroleum and natural gas would be gone by around the year 2000. Instead oil and gas supplies are in worldwide oversupply, and so inexpensive that the gasses they release are causing climate change.

- The runaway plagues that were predicted (and have been the subject of a number of popular movies) have not materialized. Death from infectious diseases has fallen, and the focus is now on other health problems, like obesity and the opioid epidemic.

- Western nations are not choking on pollution. Improvements in smog have been noted in nearly every major city.

- Extreme poverty as defined by the World Bank has declined from 37% in 1990 to 10%.

- In spite of the publicity of mass shootings and terrorist attacks, crime rates are at historic lows in the US and elsewhere.

- A century ago 80 percent of humanity could not read or write. Global illiteracy now stands at around 15%.

Easterbrook concludes that, *"at every stage in the past, life spans were shorter, disease was more common, living standards were lower, discrimination and pollution were worse, and liberty more imperiled."* He spends the next 300 pages exploring each of these areas and how and why things have gotten better.

It seems that every dire prediction did not take into account the ability to adapt and change to meet the challenges of the future. New methods of producing food, extracting oil from the ground, innovative approaches to combatting disease, and the application of human ingenuity in addressing economic and social ills have conquered what were thought to be hopeless problems. While the work is never done, and new challenges continue to emerge, there is evidence (like the graph on my daughter's hospital room wall) that supports an optimistic view of the future.

Optimism in leadership is an especially important virtue. Intel co-founder Robert Noyce once said that optimism is an "essential ingredient of innovation. How else can the individual welcome change over security, adventure over staying in safe places?" It would appear that change and optimism are closely intertwined. Conversely, hopelessness (in the form of pessimism or apathy) can extinguish every effort to change and improve. Leading change requires a healthy dose of optimism.

But like other important virtues, optimism can be harmful if taken too far. In his book, **Thinking Fast and Slow**, author Daniel Kahneman describes the result of unchecked optimism

and overconfidence in making poor decisions. Many failures in life are the result of unrealistic assumptions. But in spite of all of these dangers, he concludes that there are great benefits to being optimistic: *"When action is needed, optimism, even of the mildly delusional variety, may be a good thing."* In short, when faced with an important decision don't let optimism cause you to ignore risks. But the call to action and implementing a decision requires a positive outlook in order to succeed.

Where does optimism come from? Some people are more inclined to optimism by their general nature or life experience. While these natural tendencies work for some people, it is my opinion that personality based optimism is not always durable in times of stress. This point of view is supported by what is called The Stockdale Paradox.

In the book **Good to Great**, Jim Collins recounts the story of Admiral Jim Stockdale, who was held captive for eight years during the Vietnam War. When asked how he survived this ordeal, Stockdale told Collins, *"I never lost faith in the end of the story… I never doubted not only that I would get out, but also that I would prevail in the end and turn the experience into the defining event of my life, which, in retrospect, I would not trade."*

What makes this a paradox is that while Stockdale had remarkable faith in the unknowable, he noted that it was always the most optimistic of his prison mates who failed to make it out of there alive. Optimists were the ones who said, *"We're going to be out by Christmas. And Christmas would come, and Christmas would go. Then they'd say, 'We're going to be out by Easter.' And Easter would come, and Easter would go. And then Thanksgiving, and then it would be Christmas again. And they died of a broken heart."* What the optimists failed to do was confront the reality of their

situation. Based on *this information, Jim Collins summarized the essence of the Stockdale Paradox:*

You must retain faith that you will prevail in the end, regardless of the difficulties. AND at the same time…You must confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.

From my perspective, faith based optimism is the foundation of the Stockdale paradox – the belief that there is a loving God that cares about each and every human being on earth and has a purpose for the world and the events that surround us. Faith based optimism transcends the feelings of the moment and looks beyond this world all the way to eternity. Followers of Jesus can identify with the words of Admiral Stockdale, *"I never lost faith in the end of the story".*

We are all called to be optimistic in a world that is steeped in negativity. But this call is more than just about being a good leader. It is a call that can lead to a happier and more satisfying life.

Blessings,

Reflections on Leadership

PRESBYTERIAN SENIOR LIVING

Teams and Teamwork

This year our family vacation took us to the Olympic National Park, an amazingly scenic place in the extreme upper northwest corner of Washington State. In addition to being an absolutely stunning place to visit, I was curious to see the town of Sequim, near Port Angeles, the birthplace of Olympic Rower Joe Rantz, the main character in classic Daniel James Brown book **The Boys in the Boat** (which was also the subject of a PBS special). An inspiring true story, sometimes referred to as "Chariots of Fire with oars", it chronicles the 1936 U.S. men's Olympic eight-oar rowing team. This group of working class sons of loggers, shipyard workers, and farmers from the University of Washington emerged from the hardships of the depression to beat the teams of elite eastern universities, the sons of British aristocrats of Oxford and Cambridge, and in the final race in Berlin, the athletes of Nazi Germany in the presence of Adolf Hitler. Aside from the heartwarming story of the value of hard work, grit, and determination, it is at its core, a story of the creation of a team in a sport that requires absolute precision.

The value of teamwork and the role of the leader in creating and nurturing an effective team have received a lot of attention in recent years. Books like Collins **Good to Great** have focused on "Getting the right people on the bus". Other authors (**Team of Teams** and **One Mission**) have focused on getting teams to cooperate with each other. Doris Kerns Goodwin's classic **Team of Rivals** chronicles Lincoln's ability to forge a team from a group of highly competitive individuals with differing viewpoints who were not naturally inclined to be cooperative. In the sports world, scores of books are written about how winning teams are created and sustained. It seems that everyone has something to say about teams.

In reality the concept of teams and teamwork is multi-dimensional and exceedingly complex, and the effectiveness of a team is not based on a set of universal characteristics or driven by a set of predictable formulas. Even in the world of competitive sports the concept of teamwork is highly variable. At one end of the spectrum is a golf team or a track and field team – where individuals compete and scores are tallied at the end of the match. Team members can encourage each other, but they are (for the most part) equal to the sum of their parts.

Hockey teams may occupy the other end of the spectrum. Each team consists of 20 team members, with six being on the ice at any given time – 5 skaters and a goalie. The five skating players (referred to as a line) rotate on and off the ice in constant motion - shifts that last an average of about 45 seconds. Each line could be considered a separate team with different skill sets, but their success is measured by the score achieved by the entire roster.

The extremes of the sports environment are not unlike the rest of the world. The work of a sales organization may bear a resemblance to a golf team, while information technology or some types of health care delivery may feel closer to hockey. The point is that the team ingredients that are critical to success can vary greatly based on the nature of the tasks to be accomplished. In the process of examining the teamwork requirements, it is helpful to ask a number of questions:

- What is the pace of change and how frequently are adjustments required in the execution of the team's planned work?

- What are the time constraints and the need for accuracy and consistency (like the delivery of Medication or the time meals are served)?

- Are there critical handoffs to other teams or other team members (like the change of shift or new admissions and discharges)?

- Is it possible to adjust the work to fit the skills of the team members or are predetermined roles unavoidable?

Once these answers are known, how can a leader's work contribute to a creating and sustaining a high performing team?

Selecting the right team members

Who we chose to be on our team may be the most critical decision we make as leaders. If we get that fundamental task wrong, there is little else that can compensate to deliver a successful result. Jim Collins uses the image of "getting the right people on the bus" to illustrate the importance of selecting the right team members. He also talks about getting people in the right seats. So how do we decide who gets on our team? Typically there are three things that are the focus of an employment interview:

- **Intellectual and physical ability** –Is the person smart enough to grasp the complexity of the work to be performed and physically able to do the required tasks?

- **Expertise** –Does the individual display the range of skills that can be specifically applied to the job in question?

- **Experience** – Has the individual demonstrated the capacity to do the work in other settings? Does their work history suggest that they will be a reliable team member?

However, we all know that this is not enough. We have all selected people to fill positions that looked like a great hire when we used the above questions, only to discover later that they were not the right person for the job. There are other considerations that are harder to evaluate:

- **Humility** – This is a virtue that is not widely admired or practiced. The simplest way I can express the idea is whether or not the person is focused on others or if they think the world is all about them.

- **Self-awareness** – We need team members that are confident in his or her abilities, but aware of their own imperfection. Lack of confidence can cause all kinds of problem behavior – defensiveness, hypersensitivity, inability to take responsibility for a problem or concern, and the need to be right all of the time – all incompatible to developing a cohesive and high performing team.

- **Relational orientation** – Respect for others, empathy (the ability to see the world from another person's perspective), recognition of other's strengths and abilities and a willingness to help someone else succeed. This critical talent can be tainted by our naturally competitive instincts.

Model the behavior you expect from your team. There are a few simple questions that help to measure your success in this area:

- When given a choice between making myself look good or uplifting one of my co-workers, what do I choose to do?

- Can I acknowledge my own imperfection or take responsibility for an unsuccessful outcome without becoming defensive or feeling depressed or inadequate?

- Do I really listen when someone else is expressing a point of view that is different or contradictory to my own, or do I mentally focus on responding or rebutting their arguments while they are speaking to me?

Establish clear goals – Everyone needs to know where they are headed and how the team is going to get there in order to contribute to the overall effectiveness of the team.

Provide Feedback and set boundaries – While most leaders are adept at finding areas that require improvement, positive feedback when the team is on the right track is as important as correction.

Identify and reward team results – Individual rewards result in individual thinking. Team rewards will change the focus to the success of the team.

The message of **The Boys in the Boat** is that creating a team can be a difficult and sometimes frustrating experience, and the pride of achieving success is directly connected to the effort required to overcome great obstacles. In the end, leading or being a member of a successful team can be intensely satisfying, and can create a bond between team members that is unlike any other.

Reflections on Leadership

Stewardship- Life Applications

September 2018

One of the pillars of PSL's Leadership culture is the principle of stewardship. At first glance it appears to have a mostly financial focus – The effective application of resources to achieve the mission of the organization. This is consistent with Webster's definition of stewardship: *"The conducting, supervising, or managing of something; especially: the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care.*

But like many words in common use, the definition of stewardship has been changing over time, and has evolved to into something much larger. Stewardship is now described as *"An ethic that embodies the responsible planning and management of resources. The concepts of stewardship can be applied to the environment and nature, economics, health, property, information, theology, etc. "*

Using this expanded definition, it is easy to see that every person is involved in some form of stewardship. Environmentalists talk about stewardship of the earth's resources. Owners of older homes refer to themselves as being stewards of a property that has historical significance. As parents, we are stewards of our families. (I have been reminded that as parents we do not own our children, but have been given the opportunity to nurture them for a time and prepare them to be responsible adults). We are all responsible for how we use life's most precious resource - time. Stewardship may engage each person in a slightly different way, but it applies to everyone.

Over the years I have spent a good deal of time thinking about the many aspects of stewardship, and would like to share a few observations that make sense to me:

Stewardship has deep, spiritual roots. My earliest recollection of stewardship is connected to my faith experience. In my religious teaching, I learned from the first chapter of the book of Genesis, that human beings were given dominion over the earth – not domination. The resources of the earth and everything we possess in this life are considered gifts from God and humankind holds them in trust for the Creator of all things. As such we are responsible to a higher authority for how we use these resources during our lifetime. At the very least, this realization should make every one of us an environmentalist at heart.

Stewardship recognizes the benefits received from preceding generations. It has been said that we have all been warmed by fires we did not start, and have drunk from wells we did not dig. Stewardship acknowledges a debt of gratitude to others whose sacrifice and hard work have made the life we presently enjoy a possibility. These messages are often eloquently expressed on Memorial Day as we reflect on the cost of living in a free society. But the work of preceding generations can be found all around us in bridges, roads, schools, churches, family, art and music. Nearly everything of value that "belongs to us" has been constructed on the foundation provided by those who came before us.

Stewardship takes the long view. Just as we have received the benefit of the work of previous generations, the decisions we make in life leave behind a legacy for future generations. Stewardship asks the question – if everyone behaved in this way, what would the world look like in the future? The world is not just about the here and now – it is about the world we leave behind for

those who will follow us. All of our decisions must be made with future generations in mind.

Stewardship is about letting go. In his book *Stewardship*, Peter Block emphasizes the need for leaders to move from control to partnership. He calls it "choosing partnership over patriarchy". This change is not as easy as it sounds, as the consumer demand for quality, consistency, and predictability remain. Holding on to control and power, while attractive in the short run, is not sustainable over time. The truth of this concept is illustrated in the role of being a parent. In many ways the task of parenting is all about letting go. Success in raising children into adults comes down to teaching values and fostering independence and growth. The idea of engaging others in partnership is even more critical in the work environment as leaders compete for the hearts and minds of their team members.

Stewardship embraces accountability for the things we do <u>and</u> the missed opportunities to do better things with the resources available to us. This idea was clearly articulated by Jesus in Matthew chapter 25. In this parable a property owner leaves on a journey, and in his absence, gives instructions to three of his servants. Each one is given a different amount of money (interestingly referred to as Talents

– a measure of weights applied to precious metals), but they are given the freedom to invest it as they see fit. The servants are fully aware that the master will return and hold them accountable for the stewardship of what he has entrusted to them. Two of the servants invest wisely, and are praised and rewarded when the master returns. The third, being deathly afraid of risk, hides the money in the ground. The master deals harshly with this servant, calling him wasteful and lazy, ultimately taking his money back, and casting the servant out. The message conveyed by Jesus is that doing nothing is poor stewardship. Stewardship calls us to take prudent risks with the resources we have been given.

Stewardship fosters a spirit of generosity. Central to the concept of stewardship is the realization that we have temporary access to and control over our worldly possessions. As I was growing up my parents always told me that I should be generous in helping less fortunate people because it is impossible to take any earthly possessions with me when my life is over. In the words of my Mom, "There are no pockets in a shroud".

Finally, **Stewardship acknowledges the temporary nature of life.** This is especially important when it comes to the stewardship of something we all possess in limited quantities – time. Because the clock is always ticking, time can and does slip by almost completely without notice. One of the biggest questions in life is whether the stewardship of our time reflects our personal and professional values.

For people of faith there is an additional dimension to the stewardship of time. Not only is our time on earth precious and short, but we are accountable to God for

how we use our time. Most of all, we recognize that all human beings are temporary occupants in a temporary world. In Chapter 11 of the Book of Hebrews, the apostle Paul lists the heroes of the faith, calling them "foreigners and strangers on earth" on a journey to a "better country – a heavenly one" where time will no longer be a scarce commodity. The realization that our daily journey is on the "Homeward Road" provides a valuable framework for stewardship of the time we have been given.

Homeward Roads

Our lives are spent on homeward roads,
Eyes fixed upon the way ahead.
We lift and carry heavy loads,
Upon our backs; we swiftly tread
And bear the weight without a sound,
Believing we're invincible.
Accumulating pound by pound
We move along by strength of will.

But one day soon the road will end
And we will lay our baggage down.
Someone else will carry on
And own the things we used to own.
Ours was the loss. We missed the joy
Of living each and every day.
We were the beast of burden,
Not masters of our chosen way.

From time to time I clearly see
A vision of the life I lead;
And watch the days as they unfold
While moving down the homeward road.

S Proctor

Reflections on Leadership
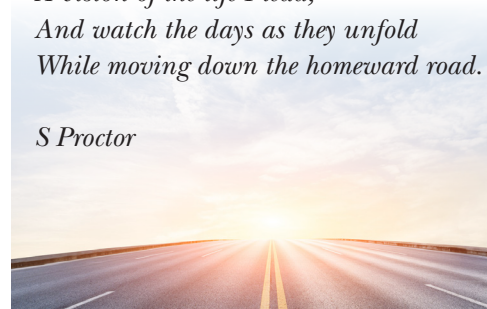
PRESBYTERIAN SENIOR LIVING

Contemplating Change

As you might imagine, with the Presbyterian Senior Living Board announcement of my intended retirement in June of 2019, the subject of change has been on my mind. When I think of my history with Presbyterian Senior Living, I am immediately struck by how much things have changed over time. When I started to work at Presbyterian Homes as a nurse in 1971, there were a total of 370 persons served and approximately 85 staff members. Today these numbers have grown to more than 6,000 persons served and 2,800 staff members. In addition to an increase in size there is a much wider range of services, a more complex regulatory environment, changes in technology, and greater expectations of the people we are called to serve. Looking back, change has been an ever present companion for the past 47 years.

Through this experience I have come to believe that the need for change is the reason organizations require strong leadership to survive and thrive over the long term. Mediocre leadership may be sufficient to keep an established process going in a stable environment. Superior leadership is required to chart a new course in the face of uncertainty.

Many books have been written about leadership and change. One of my favorites is John Kotter's classic, *Leading Change*. In his revised preface to the book in 2012 he observes that management is not leadership. *"Management makes a system work. It helps you do what you know how to do. Leadership builds systems or transforms old ones. It takes you into territory that is new and less well known, or even completely unknown to you. This point has huge implications in an ever-faster-moving world."*

His 8 stage process of creating major change is still relevant, even though it was first introduced 23 years ago (about the same time I was being hired as PSL's third CEO):

1. Establishing a sense of urgency
2. Creating a guiding coalition
3. Developing a vision and strategy
4. Communicating the change vision
5. Empowering broad-based action
6. Generating short term wins
7. Consolidating gains and producing more change
8. Anchoring new approaches in the culture

A big part of the success of this model is in the sequencing of the steps. Most of his book is dedicated to how these various steps interact and prepare the way for change to become the new normal.

For those of us in the trenches of delivering service every day, some of these ideas about change can seem a bit abstract. But for anyone who has lived through a change that was poorly executed, following Kotter's approach appears much more practical.

Given the fact that change is inevitable and sorely needed to achieve a mission and survive in a competitive world, the question of timing comes to the forefront.

Business author Daniel Pink has written a book called ***When, The Scientific Secrets of Perfect Timing***. In one part of the book, Pink reviews a study by Connie Gersick about groups of people working on projects of various types (banks, hospitals, information technology, and academics). What Gersick discovered was that change was not a constant – it seems to happen in spurts. *"In a concentrated burst of changes, groups dropped old patterns, reengaged with outside supervisors, adopted new perspectives to their work, and made dramatic progress." "They experienced extended periods of inertia interrupted by swift bursts of activity."* The idea of a constantly evolving change process is not the way it works in the real world. There are periods of intense change followed by periods of relative tranquility.

So what is the catalyst that can ignite a burst of change? My closest friends and colleagues know that one of my favorite sayings is that people and organizations are driven to change by inspiration or desperation. Unfortunately, most occupy the deadly space in between and simply muddle through, waiting for a flash of inspiration or procrastinating until a point of desperation. Sometimes the combination of inspiration and desperation is required to make significant changes.

Pink connects this midpoint / burst of energy theory of change to a basketball story from 1982. The University of North Carolina trailed Georgetown University by one point at halftime in the title game of the NCAA championship. Georgetown was led by Patrick Ewing, the most physically imposing player in college basketball, who was a dominating defensive force. According to Pink, Dean Smith's

halftime speech included the following outlook to his players – "We are in great shape. I would rather be in our shoes than in theirs. We are exactly where we want to be." UNC went on to win the national title by one point.

It appears that there was more to Dean Smith's statement than pure optimism. A later study of more than 18,000 National Basketball Association games confirmed the accuracy of Smith's impression. Teams behind by a single point at halftime were more likely to win than teams who were ahead by one point. Apparently realizing that you are a little behind and that time is growing short is a perfect combination of inspiration and desperation.

A time of transition and shortly thereafter is a midpoint that is ripe for creative change. The inspiration fueled by a new vision, the energy to tackle the challenges of the future, and the realization that staying the same is not an option combines to create a feeling that is a lot like being down by one point in a big game. Ultimately it is the mindset in a time of change can make all the difference in an organizations' future. According to Pink, this mindset is shaped by three overarching thoughts:

- Be aware of (plan for) midpoints. Don't let them be invisible.

- Use a midpoint to wake up rather than to roll over.

- Imagine that you are behind – but only by a little.

All of these elements are present in the PSL board succession plan that was formulated several years ago, and is being implemented at this time.

Some of my thoughts on change are personal. I have been getting the question – what are you going to do in retirement? While I have had a number of thoughts about retirement in the past, the reality of approaching retirement places a new lens on the subject. This is similar to the feeling I get when looking at a speeding car approaching from behind while driving on the turnpike. In small letters beneath the image is the reminder "Objects in the mirror may appear closer than they are." The distance and pace of the car that is likely to pass you is important, but the main thing is to pay attention to the road ahead. The work goes on.

Finally, there are daily reminders that change is both serious business and part of a natural progression in life. Life (and change) is a combination of major issues and day to day events. This point occurred to me a couple of weeks ago when I received a food service complaint letter from an independent living resident that concluded with a congratulatory note on my retirement. The difference between a significant change and a normal life event is often just a matter of perspective.

Blessings,

Reflections on Leadership

Creating Community

November 2018

Like many other faith based not-for-profit senior care providers, creating a sense of community is a central feature of Presbyterian Senior Living's mission. Our mission statement references creating "vibrant, compassionate and supportive communities" as the primary way we "promote wholeness of body, mind, and spirit." Whenever we open a new building, the dedication program features scripture readings that focus on the creation of a new community. *(I Peter 2:10) "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." (Ephesians 2:19) "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God".*

The words I use to follow these scripture readings reinforce our intentions. *"The completion of the building that we are celebrating today is more than shelter from the elements – it is a sacred space, where new relationships will be formed, where neighbors will reach out to help each other in kindness and compassion, and where people will experience peace in their lives."* This is the way we launch every new building in the PSL Family.

This approach reflects a truth that has been known for centuries. Creating a sense of community - a family of faith - was an essential part of the movement that was called the Church. The writer of the book of Hebrews was clear about how important the cultivating supportive relationships was in the life

of believers, encouraging new converts to *"not abandon our own meetings, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other" Hebrews 10:25 (New English Translation)*. Life is a journey that was not intended to be a solo experience.

I recently reread Malcolm Gladwell's 2008 book – **Outliers, The Story of Success**. The theme of the book is that there are "people whose achievements fall outside of the normal experience, and the reasons for their success is often found in unexpected places." The introductory chapter of the book is called the *Roseto Mystery*. In the 1960's, a physician by the name of Stuart Wolf initiated a study of the inhabitants of Roseto, a small town in northeastern Pennsylvania trying to figure out why the individuals in this community were healthier (as measured by death rates for various kinds of illnesses) than any of the other communities they previously studied. After finding no difference in medical and family histories, diet, and test results of various types they were baffled. What

they discovered was that "there was no suicide, no alcoholism, no drug addiction, and very little crime." They could not even find evidence of peptic ulcers. In Dr. Wolf's words, "People were dying of old age, that's it." It seemed that the town of Roseto was an outlier.

Ultimately the answer was discovered when they looked beyond the individuals to the wider community. The secret to their health was found in their relationships – the feeling of community that included their friends and family and the values of the people around them. They concluded that a warm and almost "magical" community was their secret to a happier and healthier life.

Where can we find our own version of community connections? They can be found all around us. Organizations like Presbyterian Senior Living are actually a collection of communities. These following are a few examples:

- **Customers.** Often times our independent living residents remark, "What I did not fully realize when I thought about coming to a PSL retirement community is that I would be surrounded by such extraordinary neighbors. The friendships and support has been the best thing that has happened to me." This includes a wide variety of special interest groups that strengthen the bonds that add a richness and texture to life.

Creating Community

- **Staff.** Work has been called the new neighborhood. Researchers from the University of Minnesota - Eric Dahlin, Erin Kelley, Phillis Moen published an article **The Sociological Quarterly** in 2008 that suggested that for many people, social ties in the workplace may be replacing traditional ties to neighbors.

- **Volunteers.** What inspires an individual to freely give hundreds of hours every year in volunteer service? Most observers agree that one of the primary drivers is a social connection and the feeling of making a contribution to the greater good.

- **Governance.** I am often asked the question, how is it possible for not-for-profit organizations to recruit individuals to take on the responsibility of being on a governing board when there is no compensation for the hours and expertise these people provide? It is my experience that the call to service and sense of community are the reasons behind this generous spirit. "I will miss the relationships" is a common theme whenever someone rotates off the

PSL Board after serving the maximum number of consecutive terms.

- **President's Club and Chairman's Circle** are two groups that have been formed to identify persons who have made an outstanding contribution to the PSL mission. The sense of common purpose and personal connection when these groups meet is both joyful and energizing.

There are many forces that work against the effort to strengthen community relationships. The impact of social media has redefined the term "friend" from a close personal relationship to describe an audience of observers or acquaintances that exist in an electronic world. It was an odd experience when I received my first Facebook message many years ago - a friend request from my wife. There are many people who live with the paradox of having many Facebook "friends" and few meaningful relationships.

Why should leaders care about community, and what is a leader's role in creating community? One could argue that creating community is the primary role of an effective leader. Every conversation about organizational culture and shared values is connected to creating community. Extending the concept of community to the workplace has the potential to impact customer loyalty – repeat business, word of mouth referrals, and positive reputation. Furthermore, staff retention, turnover, trust and teamwork are all enhanced when leaders foster a "community at work". In a competitive senior care employment market, the ability to integrate new staff into a warm and friendly community of caregivers may be the difference between success and failure.

It is my experience that the best leaders are adept at creating a community of people that embrace shared values and meaning. This can be difficult to do when groups of people are more diverse and may be sharply divided on social, political, and religious issues. Effective leaders understand that a culture based on mutual respect and trust has the power to overcome these barriers to create an environment where everyone is appreciated and can experience a sense of belonging. For PSL, this approach is rooted in our mission – "Guided by the Life and teachings of Jesus", whose example calls us to treat everyone with kindness and compassion.

Like most things in life, the creation of a healthy community is driven by example. Leaders who consistently display strength of character, express a genuine interest in people, articulate an overarching purpose, establish clear goals, and display an unwavering commitment to something beyond their personal interest will rise above the mediocrity of those around them. People might even describe such a leader and their organization as an outlier.

Blessings,

Reflections on Leadership

Search for Humility

December 2018

Of all of the virtues associated with leadership, humility is the most underappreciated. Books are written about courageous leaders throughout history. Great intellect is cited as essential for visionary leadership in uncertain times. Honesty and integrity, both fundamental to effective leadership, take center stage whenever there is an ethical collapse in the corporate, religious, and governmental arenas. Creativity and innovation are both exciting leadership characteristics that are highly desired. Stories of compassionate and sensitive leaders warm our hearts.

But books on humility never appear on the best seller lists. I think the reason that humility is the one aspect of leadership that consistently flies below the radar is because it presents an interesting dilemma. How do you draw attention to the idea of humility in leadership without corrupting its very essence? Imagine being the publicist for an author who has written a book about humility. A recent article in the Wall Street Journal, by Sue Shellenbarger titled **"Humble Bosses Make the Best Leaders"** illustrates a similar contradiction. The very term "Boss" would not normally be found as the description of a humble person in a position of leadership. People who are referred to as "bossy" are not regarded as servant leaders.

But the concept of humility and leadership has been gaining traction in recent years. Shellenbarger describes humble leaders as having an awareness of personal weaknesses, appreciation of the strengths of others, and being focused on goals beyond self-interest. Specific benefits of humility in leadership in a business enterprise include lower turnover and absenteeism, improved teamwork and rapid learning. Humility in leadership seems to be accompanied by a cluster of other attributes like sincerity, modesty, fairness, truthfulness, and unpretentiousness. With these benefits being identified, humility is now the subject of measurement and study. Some companies are even trying to instill humility in senior executives in a nine month long training program. I have to admit that I have a hard time imagining putting together the educational content that would turn arrogant executives into humble servant leaders.

In our leadership education at PSL we talk about the call of two trumpets.

One is the inner life of a leader, and the other is something referred to as applied leadership. The inner life is who you are. Applied leadership is the outward behavior that others observe in your role as a leader. It is possible to behave in certain virtuous ways without actually internalizing the virtue. However, following this path has a certain risk. Given the normal pressures of lack of time and resources the inner values will always shine through and expose the underlying character. Once a leader is exposed as inauthentic, it is difficult to resume a trusting relationship with those on your team. This situation may sound pretty complicated, but in reality is fairly simple. There are no shortcuts. If you want to be a better leader, become a better person.

Humility and great leadership is actually a pretty old idea. In the twelfth chapter of the Old Testament book of Numbers, Moses is described as *"a very humble man, more humble than any other person on the*

face of the earth." Where did this genuine humility come from? Three verses after being described as the most humble man on earth, these words are recorded as coming directly from God *"When there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, reveal myself to them in visions, I speak to them in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD."*

This does not imply that Moses was perfect. To the contrary, Moses' life was marked by a number of serious shortcomings. Overcome by anger, he killed a man and had to flee Egypt. He stubbornly resisted the call to serve, even when confronted by the voice of God in a burning bush. His impatience with his followers resulted in a disobedient act that prevented his entry into the promised land. Looking at the story of Moses life, it seems to me that Moses' humility was rooted in knowing God face to face. His imperfections became crystal clear through his relationship with a holy God. While no one I have ever known can lay claim to being anything like Moses, there is something in the Old Testament account that we can apply to our search for humility. True humility of character is a deeply spiritual experience.

There are benefits of humility that extend beyond the desire to become a better leader. Jesus' life and teachings were a study in humility. The most striking illustration in Jesus' teaching is the parable of the Pharisee and Tax Collector in Luke chapter 18. Both men enter the temple to pray at about the same time. The Pharisee's prayer was entirely self-congratulatory, listing his virtues and arrogantly pointing out his righteousness compared to the tax

collector. By contrast, the tax collector was contrite, and humbly begged for forgiveness. The parable concludes with a pronouncement from Jesus. *"I tell you this sinner, not the Pharisee returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."* The message is clear and rather unsettling. Humility is a precursor to receiving God's forgiveness.

For many people of faith, there is another strong connection between humility and forgiveness. The understanding that in spite of our unworthiness and imperfections we have been forgiven by a holy and loving God. This becomes the foundation for seeing the world through the eyes of humility. How can we think of ourselves as being superior to anyone else in life when we have been the recipient of such a precious and undeserved gift?

Humility may be the most elusive of all virtues. Pride, arrogance, and feelings of entitlement, are constantly nipping at our heels. Our own sense of self-worth can be mistakenly tied to feeling superior to others to whom we favorably compare ourselves. The truth is that anyone who claims to have mastered the art of being humble is already losing the battle. C.S. Lewis observed in his classic book Screwtape Letters, *"All virtues are less formidable… once the man is aware that he has them, but this is especially true of humility."*

Finally, the message of humility should be foremost in our thoughts during the Christmas season. The main characters in the Christmas story (Mary and Joseph) display the virtues of humility and obedience. The hardship of forced travel and the images of poverty and

homelessness intertwined with the travail of childbirth and a baby laid in a manger are a most humble beginning to the Gospel accounts. Jesus teaching on personal humility is found in the 22nd Chapter of the book of Luke. *"For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves."*

The end of Jesus' life was even more humble than his birth – exposed and crucified on a cross, mocked with a crown of thorns. If we claim to be "guided by the life and teachings of Jesus" we must embrace the concept of humility and make it a part of our inner life and outward behavior.

Blessings,