

Leadership: A virtue that orthodontic professionals need to posses



Leadership can be defined as a “process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task.”^[1]

For example, some understand a leader simply as somebody whom people follow or as somebody who guides or directs others, while others define leadership as “organizing a group of people to achieve a common goal.”

Studies of leadership have produced theories involving traits, situational interaction, function, behavior, power, vision and values, charisma, and intelligence, among others. The best corporate entities or governments are driven by a leader’s vision. Why would orthodontic departments and practices be any different?

A “vision” implies a clear understanding of what you want to accomplish and where you want your professional endeavors to result in, in a specified period. Orthodontists must have a vision for the future of their practices if they are to grow successfully and prosper. Effective leaders share the practice vision with the team. Explaining the vision helps the staff become active participants in building a practice and achieving all goals.^[2]

Running a successful orthodontic practice is about more than just practicing orthodontics. It is about leading a group of people on a journey focused on achieving measurable goals. It is about maximizing talents and teamwork to accomplish something that could not be done individually. Numerous studies in the orthodontic literature have proven this fact explicitly.^[3-5] Successful practices are about providing exemplary patient care while attaining increased levels of production and profitability.

IS LEADERSHIP ABOUT A FORMULA?

When it comes to leadership, there is no one size fits all. Every leader has his/her own personality, style, and approach to leading teams. Having stated that there are leadership truths and myths that seem to be consistent. This editorial will discuss these traits and aim to inspire orthodontic professionals to reassess their thought processes on these principles of leadership.

IS LEADERSHIP ABOUT ALWAYS WORKING “SMART” AND NOT HARD?

The “work smarter” principle is something that all of us will agree with, but the “not harder” part does raise eyebrows. There are definitely ways to be smarter about prioritizing your tasks effectively, planning your day wisely to increase your productivity, and as a leader, to know when and what tasks to delegate.

But every single successful practitioner or academician I have met has always worked very hard on realizing his/her dreams. Great leaders empower their teams to do more; they are very protective of their time. They are shrewd in applying their knowledge and experience in order to move forward and avoid mistakes either they themselves or others made in the past. One could call that “working smart.”

But nothing great has ever been achieved without working hard. True leaders lead by example, they are first in and last ones out, they are fully invested in the vision of their ventures and, through showing their dedication, they inspire people around them to show the same kind of commitment and display the same behaviors.

We are living through a period right now where we have a lot of very smart people looking at math, and analytics, and efficiencies, these are all great things to take pride in, but you need to put in the work ... Gary Vaynerchuck, an entrepreneur, states it aptly “you can call out all the best business opportunities you want, but the bottom line is that nobody ever got paid to make snow angels.” This reminds me of something my dad would tell me as a little boy “don’t waste time learning the tricks of the trade, learn the trade!”

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“There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work, and learning from failure.”

—Colin Powell

IS A LEADER A “KNOW IT ALL?”

A common myth among people is that leaders have all the answers. On the contrary, the best leaders have a clear understanding of their own limitations. They know that success is a team sport, and there is no such thing as a “self-made” man. They realize that it takes a diverse team to innovate truly.

They search for passionate people in diverse areas of expertise and bring them together. Great leaders listen more than they speak. They listen with the goal to understand, not a goal to answer. They hire amazing teams and solicit regular input from team members. They admit their mistakes and empower their people to execute on the office’s vision through their own knowledge and initiative versus a dictate from above.

Truly amazing leaders empower others to become leaders. Their higher goal is to work themselves out of the job so that if they are not around, the organization functions just as successfully as when they were in it.

“A leader is best when people barely know he exists, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: We did it ourselves.”

—Lao Tzu

DO ALL GREAT LEADERS LOVE THE “SPOTLIGHT?”

It is true that if you are a leader of a practice or a department, there is an expectation that you will also be the spokesperson for the enterprise. But the leadership comes in many forms. You do not have to be on the organization’s executive team to be a leader. True leaders (whether they are at the helm or not) are humble. They do not much care about the spotlight. They care about the results. And that comes from focus.

Some of the greatest leaders of our time were simple men who shied away from the limelight and yet have transformed professions and taken it to new heights.

In his book *Good to Great*, Jim Collins says that exceptional leaders channel their ego needs away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great organization.

“It’s not that they have no ego or self-interest,” says Collins. “Indeed, they are incredibly ambitious – but their ambition is the first and foremost for the institution, not themselves.” These amazing leaders, Collins found, “are a study in duality: Modest and willful, humble and fearless.” Actually, orthodontic literature is resounding with many such names. The APOS as an organization has had many such OBs in the past.

An Orthodontic Department chair on retirement said, “I never stopped trying to become qualified for the job.” This was the humility of a person who has had a distinguished career as a researcher and an academician.

Society often tries to mistake “modesty for weakness.” Being out of the spotlight, sometimes helps retain focus and deliver more for leaders.

“It’s alright to be Goliath but always act like David.”

—Philip Knight

ARE LEADERS ALWAYS “ON THE JOB?”

Even though great leaders work hard, they realize that they need the space to be able to strategize, to think, to create.

“Restore connection is not just for devices,” cautions Arianna Huffington. “It is for people too. If we cannot disconnect, we cannot lead.” Leaders like Steve Jobs and Bill Gates were known to go away for extended periods of time to reconnect with themselves, their vision, and their ideas.

Leaders need to find that place of wisdom, strength, and real connection (with themselves and others) and they need to lead from that place. Smart leaders also build a culture of creativity through encouraging their employees to take time to reflect. It’s imperative to incorporate this trait early enough in our careers.

“Creating a culture of burnout is opposite to creating a culture of sustainable creativity.”

—Arianna Huffington

ARE LEADERS “BORN” OR “MADE?”

“The most dangerous leadership myth is that leaders are born – that there is a genetic factor to leadership. This myth asserts that people simply either have certain charismatic qualities or not. That’s nonsense; in fact, the opposite is true. Leaders are made rather than born.”

—Warren G. Bennis

Leaders are created just like anything else, through hard work. And hard work and training are the price we will have to pay to achieve any goal. Anyone can excel at anything if they truly put their mind to it.

Leadership is a skill, not a genetic disposition. Despite strong predilections, sensitizing ourselves to the need of incorporating “leadership training” to augment our existing domain skills, will go a long way in the way we impact our lives in particular and the profession at large!

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