



# Dynasty

Thoughts on leadership  
by Karl Pister



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I have always been intrigued by dynasties in sports and performance. Love them or hate them, in the world of sports, the Yankees, Patriots, Bulls, Lakers, Celtics, come to mind. The Yankees, whose name breeds some strong emotions, have won 27 World Championships. The next closest team is the St. Louis Cardinals with 11.

So in 116 years of baseball, the Yankees are winning a championship about every four years. Again, not talking about emotions here, just facts, that over time, are fairly indisputable.

Getting closer to our topic of today, the nation's fifth largest airline, Alaska, is the holder of twelve straight JD Power awards for the best traditional US airline. The categories for judging are: aircraft; check-in; cost and fees; boarding/deplaning/baggage; flight crew; and reservation. They won in six of the seven categories in 2019.

What is my point and how does it apply to you?



I fly to Alaska, a lot. Until the Covid shutdown, I was on a flight every couple of days the last year or two. Almost always I am in Alaska. Why? Being northwest based, they fly most everywhere I need to go for my coaching and training. And they personify what they won the award for. Twelve years straight. That is a dynasty performance.

And, in the spirit of last Friday's post on simple, yet elite, performance measures, look at Alaska's three core values as described by their president, Ben Minicucci, in a recent video:

1. Own safety.
2. Do the right thing.
3. Be kind hearted.

Let's look at the three:

### **Own Safety:**

You can't have been around healthcare with the High Reliability Organization emphasis without hearing, sometimes controversially, the comparison with airlines and healthcare.



There is usually pushback from the medical community that the two enterprises are so different that comparisons cannot be made. Not going to debate that here. What I will say is that "owning safety" works in whatever industry you wish to choose.

For example: When the mechanic opens up a small compartment on the hydraulic system just to double check what she knows she has already checked, that is owning safety.

When my daughter, who is a nurse, goes to check the drip on a patient, even though in her hyper-compulsive, get everything right the first time approach to her work, I would put a year's salary on the fact that she already has the titration levels perfect. That is owning safety.

As a leader when you support, teach, and exemplify that level of ownership, you are building toward a dynasty level, elite organization.



## **Do the Right Thing**

As you look back on your recent life and the decisions you have made, ever notice that it is rare that you don't know, almost instantly, in most all situations, what the right thing to do is. Remember Nordstrom's mantra: Use your best judgement?

I might sound like the most naive person on the planet with this next comment, but I truly believe that people have an inherent pull toward what is right.

I cannot count the times over the last few years of extensive flying where I have had this experience with Alaska personnel. I am sure they have rules that they have to abide by, but even when they have to use them, I never feel as though the rule is more important than the customer.

They know that the right thing to do is make the flight just as pleasant and enjoyable as possible.



Can you say the same for your organization?

Do your people know just how important patient service is for your organization?

Have they connected the dots that are obvious, but so overlooked, that all of our livelihoods depend on how we treat those we come in contact with?

And that people will make decisions with their pocketbooks depending on that treatment?

### **Be Kind-hearted**

Now doesn't that sound a bit sappy and fluffy? Sort of the antithesis of being a bold leader? Why, of all the words and phrases they could have chosen, did they choose that?

Well, think about it. If you are asking your patient-facing staff to be kind-hearted, you are asking them to connect with people. And when you connect with people, on their level, things start to move, powerfully, in the right direction.

Ever had someone cut you a break on a last-minute flight change that they really didn't have to do? Chalk it up to kind-hearted.



Ever seen an airport employee run to get a wheelchair for a mother, who had recently given birth, and her new baby? Yep. That word again.

Ever heard of an exhausted, renowned CT surgeon coming in after hours, after a brutal day in the OR, in his hoodie, just because a nurse was concerned about his patient and couldn't quite define why? Kind-hearted.

Or about the circulating nurse in the OR taking the patient's hand in the pre-op area and letting her know that he would be with her "every step of the way"? Kind-hearted.

But why does it matter? Because it is the lynchpin of humanity! And you can't lead if you aren't. You might do it short term, but in the long term the absence of kind-heartedness will run your well, and the well of those around you, dry. It is why most of you went into medicine. It is something so simple, yet increasingly rare, and thus, so impactful.



So whether an airline or clinic or hospital, not bad for three simple phrases:

1. Own safety.
2. Do the right thing.
3. Be kind hearted.





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