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Thoughts on leadership  
by Karl Pister



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I was speaking to one of the surgeons I work with and we were discussing a concern regarding professionalism.

The conversation intrigued me, since it is a favorite theme of mine. I believe that professionalism does not allow for thinking of self above others. No room for that.

In my view, when one enters the field of medicine, a sacred trust is implied that at all times the patient's best interest is guarded. At no time can that be abdicated.





On the other hand, I am somewhat fanatical about family time and the foundation that establishes. We have four grown children. However, when the children were in their youth, they knew that when my pager went off, someone was in need and that was something that Dad needed to attend to. It also meant that I needed to keep a close pulse on my parenting and make sure that such obligations were counterbalanced. This meant that many times personal time was left behind. As one very wise person once said: *leadership is not the cloak of comfort....it is the robe of responsibility.*

To take this further than just my opinion, I looked up how medical professionalism is defined on the website of the American Board of Medical Specialties.

Their statement:

*Medical professionalism is a belief system in which group members (“professionals”) declare (“profess”) to each other and the public the shared competency standards and ethical values they promise to uphold in their work and what the public and individual patients can and should expect from medical professionals.*



*At the heart of these ongoing declarations is a three-part promise to acquire, maintain and advance: **(1) an ethical value system** grounded in the conviction that the medical profession exists to serve patients' and the public's interests, and not merely the self-interests of practitioners; **(2) the knowledge and technical skills necessary for good medical practice**; and **(3) the interpersonal skills necessary to work together** with patients, eliciting goals and values to direct the proper use of the profession's specialized knowledge and skills, sometimes referred to as the “art” of medicine. **Medical professionalism, therefore, pledges its members to a dynamic process of personal development, life-long-learning and professional formation**, including participation in a social enterprise that continually seeks to express expertise and caring in its work.*

*I have bolded the print that I would like to comment on for you as leaders. And if any of you still reading are not from the field of medicine, it does not take much to extrapolate from the above paragraphs the important leadership theme that can apply to your specific field.*

**An ethical value system:** Leaders must be well grounded in personal ethics. John Maxwell, the leadership teacher, was once asked to author a book on business ethics. He refused. He was willing to write one on ethics, but not on business ethics. Why? His premise was that if one has personal ethics, business ethics naturally follow.



If asked, could you elaborate on your top five values? The ones that go to your core. The ones that you cannot, truly cannot, compromise?

Without those well defined, your professionalism can easily become situationally compromised.

***The knowledge and technical skills necessary for good medical practice:*** In the book *The Speed of Trust*, the author, Steven M.R. Covey made the point that without competence, leadership and trust is always at risk. I would venture to say that this part of professionalism goes far beyond the required yearly CMEs. The deep curiosity to find the next best solution. To go to a training on an intricate procedure, not to meet a technical requirement, but to meet a personal one.

Sound too idealistic? Think about it.

***Interpersonal skills necessary to work together interpersonal skills necessary to work together:*** I cannot count the groans from well educated physicians that I have heard when bringing up the topic of emotional intelligence. The eye rolls follow closely behind. I can understand to some degree.



The field of psychology is replete with an overabundance of warm-fuzzy pseudo-theory that goes nowhere and does nothing. However, emotional intelligence theory is fairly bulletproof. Well researched from so many angles. My favorite first read in the field is *Primal Leadership*, by Daniel Goleman. I would be happy to share a synopsis of the book with you if that interests you.

So to conclude: ***Medical professionalism, therefore, pledges its members to a dynamic process of personal development, life-long-learning and professional formation*** - could there be any way to better phrase the foundation of leadership in a professional setting?

As leaders, it is imperative that those in your charge can realize the elite nature of that statement.

Not an easy task, but what a marvelous challenge!





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