

# THOUGHTS ON EXCELLENT LEADERSHIP

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by Karl Pister



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## What Do You Expect?

Sometimes it is so easy to rationalize behavior. Tired...stressed...hungry...angry...hangry...or any other of a myriad of reasons. Yet, the top class leaders demonstrate a level of self-control that we can all learn from.

I read about a well-renowned surgeon who was trained in the days where cardiac surgery training was as much hazing as it was medical training. Humiliation and anger were just part of the equation.

Two situations were described. He was in a complicated surgery during his general surgery residency. The procedure involved an amputation of a gangrenous limb. An error was made and the lead surgeon, in a burst of anger, threw a scalpel, which landed in the hand of the resident. Fortunately, no disease was transmitted by the wound.





However, the resident decided in that moment that he would never, ever, react in that way. He knew that he was capable of making the decision, beforehand, that would preclude such an outburst.

Many would state that this is not possible. They would believe that circumstances override this decision. However, not the case.

As Steven Covey stated, paraphrasing another statement by Victor Frankl, *between stimulus and response there is a space, and what we do with that space determines our success as individuals.*

So did this resident surgeon in training keep his pledge to himself?

Consider the following:

*One time, while Dr. Nelson was performing a quadruple coronary artery bypass, the patient's blood pressure dropped suddenly. Dr. Nelson calmly assessed the situation and identified that a clamp was accidentally removed by one of the team members. It was replaced immediately, and Dr. Nelson comforted the team member, saying, "I still love you," and then added jokingly, "Sometimes I love you more than other times!" He showed how an emergency should be handled—with poise, focused only on what matters most—addressing the emergency. Dr. Nelson said: "It's a matter of*



*extreme self-discipline. Your natural reaction is, 'Take me out, coach! I want to go home.' But of course you can't. A life is totally dependent on the whole surgical team. So you've got to stay just as calm and relaxed and sharp as you ever were."*

Such leadership is entirely possible....and very rare.





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