

BECOMING THE LEADER YOU NEED TO BE

Professional competency is an act of worship to God and a duty to our patients. Godliness is an important goal as we let Christ mould our hearts and minds to his will for our lives. But we need to pursue a third priority as we endeavour to model our lives after the Great Physician: being an effective leader. Effective leaders have the ability to influence others.

Christian doctors need to influence people to consider the claims of Christ. We need to influence patients to abandon destructive behaviours and take their medicine. We need to influence our professional team to perform to the highest standards. Real leaders bring real change in individual lives, groups, organisations and cultures. This is because leaders are never content with the status quo. I often tell my staff, 'There is a better way to do everything, and we're out to find it!'

Nurture, not nature

Some people seem to be natural leaders, but leadership is most often the result of nurture, not nature. If you daily devote yourself to improving your leadership, you can develop the skills you need to make a difference. Observe role models, find a mentor, read leadership books, listen to a podcast while you jog or take a leadership training course. You will learn how to deal better with less-than-ideal situations and circumstances, as well as how to choose your words wisely. You will learn how to thrive, not just survive, through seasons of change. You will learn to stick it out no matter how difficult the situation.

Integrity

Focus on certain characteristics and abilities as you develop your leadership ability. The foundational one is integrity – having an uncompromising adherence to biblical principles in your relationship to God and people in areas such as personal honesty and a sound moral character. Always remember to safeguard your integrity. People won't follow someone they don't respect.

Increasingly, influencers in our culture create their public persona. Remember, image-driven leadership won't last. People will ultimately see behind your facade. For a Christian, no dichotomy should exist between your professional and private life. Stand up for what is right, demonstrating the courage of your convictions. Courageous leadership is contagious. No one follows the fearful, but they are drawn to the daring.

Vision, communication and values

Be a visionary. One of my favourite stories is about Steve Jobs when he was trying to recruit a top executive from Coca-Cola early in the Apple saga. This executive was reluctant to join a start-up, so Jobs cast his vision by asking a question, 'Do you want to make fizzy water for

the rest of your life or do you want to change the world?' Compelled by Jobs' vision, the executive joined Apple's team.

Leaders require good communication skills. You need to articulate your vision so well that it becomes a magnetic force attracting others to join your cause. Remember, though, most people are more emotional than rational. Connect to their hearts rather than their heads. Pull don't push. If you push people too hard, you will run right over them, but they will thrive if you get out in front and pull them with your example, charisma and vision.

Communicating your values is more important than your vision. One delineates where you want to go, the other defines what those following you will be like when you get to your destination. That is why it is important to take time to form your core values, so there will be no chance you'll rationalise or compromise your stance in a moment of weakness or stress. First verbalise your leadership values to those you lead and then validate them by living them out.

Motivating others

Motivate those who follow you on the journey. People will really work for what they really want. Find what motivates them to excel. Interestingly, money doesn't motivate people long term. You can never pay people what they think they are really worth, but they will pour themselves out for a cause they believe in. Recognise their efforts by giving them as much credit as possible for their successes. As you do this, you are saying, 'What you are doing is important; what you are giving to the endeavour is making a difference and I value you.'

Add to that a sense of 'belonging' by creating a sense of family among your followers. That sense comes through shared experiences and people knowing that you genuinely care about them as a person, not just for what they do to help you further your cause. Christians have another motivation because we have a stewardship responsibility to help those following us become all that God designed them to be.

Facing worry and criticism

Don't worry. A worried leader is a whirlpool dragging everyone into a vortex. Fight worry by seeking God's guidance, following his principles, doing your best and leaving the results in his hands. The leaders Christ mentored didn't have it easy and you won't either. Don't let criticism disable you. The more you succeed, the more criticism you can expect. At the same time, always remember to explore a criticism before you ignore it.

Effective leadership is essential. With study and application, you can become the leader God designed you to be.

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