

Leadership in Orthopaedic Surgery

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Effective leaders are responsible for two things: to guide the mission, vision, and values of an organization by removing obstacles from the path of their lieutenants and to develop new leaders. This paper will help senior physicians in orthopaedic departments and professional medical associations (PMAs) identify potential new leaders and develop leadership programming.

Is it really necessary to worry about leadership skills within an orthopaedic setting? Are not most departments of orthopaedic surgery and PMAs functioning well without spending time on such a pedantic, business school issue? In actuality, over the years orthopaedics has benefited greatly by placing very talented people in leadership positions where they performed well without formal leadership training. However, the leadership requirements for many orthopaedic surgeons have grown considerably and the medical environment has become very complicated. Orthopaedic leaders now have responsibilities to their department of orthopaedics, the school of medicine, their associated hospital, and often several PMAs such as the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS), the American Orthopaedic Association (AOA), or the subspecialty societies such as the Scoliosis Research Society (SRS) and the Pediatric Orthopaedic Society of North America (POSNA).

Each orthopaedic organization should examine the leadership process through the lens of the mission, vision, and values. Is the organization accomplishing every aspect of its mission? Does the structure of the organization reflect the vision that was previously established to accomplish its mission? Are the values exemplified by the organization in general and specifically by its leaders such that the organization is regarded by the public and governmental bodies as the best source of scientific, unbiased information on its field of orthopaedic surgery? Does the organization manage leadership conflict of interest and assume a social responsibility to both control unnecessary costs in medical care and at the same time to maintain excellence in treatment? The “brand” of orthopaedic surgery very much depends on the trust placed in all of our organizations by members, by governmental policy makers, and by the general public. This trust is ultimately a reflection of the actions of the orthopaedic leaders and helping these individuals become better leaders will improve the orthopaedic brand, allowing better representation for the best interests of the patients who are our most important constituents. A cursory glance would suggest that there is room for improvement in many orthopaedic organizations. While our specialty has achieved a great deal, perhaps a formal “pathway to leadership” might accomplish even more.

This paper summarizes various personal characteristics that make people good leaders and various techniques that can improve the leadership skills in those individuals who have been chosen to lead. We will first describe three common types of organizations and the leadership style associated with each.

- Command and Control Organizations – military – this is positional leadership and leverage over followers occurs because of autocratic dictates.

- Focused Goal Organizations – business – this is also positional leadership and leverage over followers occurs because of salary, bonuses, and other economic incentives.
- Volunteer Organizations – this is the most difficult organization to lead as volunteer leaders' only form of leverage is the ability to **influence** others. However, the best leaders from the other examples, military commanders and business executives, understand this and seek to lead mostly by using their ability to influence others rather than relying on their authority. Volunteer leaders also add value by service which can cascade as other members follow the example and provide their own service. This unfortunately can also work in a negative way, as others can also mimic less desirable traits of volunteer leaders, both in and outside of the organization. Because of this, leaders have a significant responsibility to consider how their actions might influence others.

True leaders, especially in volunteer organizations, don't require impressive stature; think of Mother Teresa. They don't need titles or rank. They don't need to tell you that they are leaders, as observed by Margaret Thatcher, "being in power is like being a lady. If you have to tell people you are, you aren't". Good leaders have an ability to positively influence others.

When organizations choose leaders they should look for these attributes:

- Enhanced people skills
- Planning and strategic thinking abilities
- A history of organizational accomplishments that others will wish to emulate.
- A clear vision of the needs for the organization

Enhanced People Skills

The feats of the early twentieth century polar explorers provide examples of both good and bad leadership. Ernest Shackleton provides a perfect example of a leader with superb people skills. He was a non-coercive leader, evident even in the advertisement for his famous expedition. He wrote: "Men wanted for hazardous journey, small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful, honour and recognition in case of success".

The expedition attempted a crossing of Antarctica from sea to sea and became a disaster when their ship was first trapped and eventually crushed in the ice pack. Against all odds he rallied his men by establishing routines, including sports and lectures, which gave them hope to persevere. When their ship "Endurance" was destroyed, they pulled heavy lifeboats towards the open ocean 250 miles away. At the edge of the ice pack they were able to row to a small, barren piece of land called Elephant Island. After a short rest Shackleton and 5 others sailed 900 miles in one of the open lifeboats to get help from a whaling station on South Georgia Island. He returned several months later to rescue the other members of his party. Incredibly, no one died. Ernest Shackleton had wonderful people skills and was able to inspire and motivate his men to survive against enormous odds. Another polar explorer later remarked: "When things go bad you get down on your

knees and pray for a Shackleton". Good people skills and good character are the most important parts of leadership.

Planning and Strategic Thinking Abilities

A contrast in planning and strategic thinking capabilities can be drawn between the two teams in the 1911 race to reach the South Pole. Both Roald Amundsen and Robert Scott were renowned explorers and neither had trouble recruiting men to follow them. Amundsen was a very careful planner. Paying great attention to detail, he studied the methods and apparel of Eskimos and concluded that dogsleds, clothes made of animal skins, and proper placement of supplies along the intended route would maximize the chance of success. Amundsen and his men won the race without the loss of a single life.

Scott on the other hand was also a charismatic leader but spent little time selecting optimal equipment and travel arrangements. Without substantial testing under arctic conditions, Scott elected to use motorized sledges and ponies for transportation, poorly constructed clothes and goggles, and inadequate food supplies. In the first five days the motors on the sledges froze and the men struggled with frostbite and snow blindness. Scott and his exhausted men, pushing their heavy sledges, reached the South Pole on January 17, 1912 and found a letter from Amundsen dated a month earlier. On the return trip the entire Scott group perished from inadequate food and exposure to the severe cold. Scott had excellent people skills but did not develop sufficient planning and strategic thinking skills. His inadequacy resulted in losing the race to the pole, his life, and the lives of his men.

A History of Accomplishments

A properly chosen leader will have had many previous successes. Optimally, these will come through effective work at a council or committee level. If a leader does not work hard to complete his or her assignments on a small job then a mistake was made in choosing that person as a leader. This disappointment is rectified by limiting subsequent leadership opportunities.

A Clear Vision of the Needs of the Organization

The historic vision of an organization usually provides a good guide for new leaders. New members of committees or the board learn by watching the organization pursue its goals. However these new leaders will be more effective if they receive instruction on the structure and function of the organization, the interaction between committees, and especially the organization's expectation of how they should perform as individuals. These all should be described early and completely in the new leaders' tenure.

Everyone is Occasionally Asked to Lead

Effective leaders often display their skills in early childhood, making it seem that they acquired these skills at birth. These people are viewed by others as "natural leaders". However, everyone can expand their abilities and even those with natural leadership skills must make an effort to use them. As an orthopaedic surgeon you are expected to provide leadership, to your patients, in your hospital, and to society.

1. For All Orthopaedic Surgeons

Inappropriate physician-industry conflicts of interest are causing orthopaedics to lose credibility with the public and government bodies. Each orthopaedic surgeon should avoid consulting relationships that are inappropriate conflicts of interest. The range of consulting varies, from a physician who is integral to the development of an innovative product to a physician who receives a stipend to attend periodic company meetings but never truly participates in product development. In the first example the physician is clearly being appropriately paid to advance the technology of surgery. This relationship should be encouraged. The second example only creates a bond between the physician and the company. This bond may interfere with competitive bidding at the physician's hospital and is inappropriate.

Not everyone will agree on these recommendations but each individual should thoughtfully consider them. Interestingly, in the 2008 SRS membership survey, the question "Is there anything else we should have asked?" provoked many critical comments about physician-industry relations. And for the question "What is the single most pressing issue facing your practice today?" **adequate reimbursement** was the most common answer. Loss of credibility with the public and government due to inappropriate physician/industry relationships will not help the advocacy efforts of medicine.

2. For the Junior Faculty or new Committee Member

Junior faculty in orthopaedic departments or new committee members of a PMA should have a formal orientation, providing an understanding of the role of the department or committee, how it relates to the larger goals of the organization, how the department interacts with the medical school or how the committee interacts with other PMAs such as the SRS, POSNA, or AAOS, and what expectations exist for individual member performance. A new member Leadership Meeting is a perfect mechanism to achieve these goals. Existing faculty or committee members should also attend as they will benefit from the review as much as new members. Adequate and protected time should be allocated to the process.

3. For More Senior Faculty or Committee Members

Individuals should gain conflict resolution and ethics training as they progress through the orthopaedic department or committee structure of the PMA. These skills can be acquired by either taking courses or committing to self-study. Courses are available through several business schools. The Kellogg School of Management has excellent modules including conflict resolution, ethics, and governance that are offered under the auspices of the AOA. For those unable to attend these courses, there are two superb books on the subject. These are Crucial Conversations and Crucial Confrontations by Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, and Switzler. Both books are cited in the bibliography in this paper. These books are interesting and provide an excellent understanding of the subjects. The authors of these two books also offer worldwide training courses on conflict resolution. The orthopaedic department or the PMA should consider awarding education stipends to provide these skills to selected individuals. The course costs

approximately \$1000.00 and is offered periodically in most large cities, eliminating the need for expensive travel.

Another opinion is to select a member of the organization to develop the necessary expertise in conflict resolution, ethics, and governance. This person could then provide a yearly lecture to new faculty, committee, and board of director's members. The start-up cost to develop this expertise would run several thousand dollars but would be recovered over time by avoiding course registration and travel costs.

4. The Committee Chair

The ability to conduct an effective meeting is an important skill set. As people are placed into committee chair roles, the individuals should acquire an understanding of meeting and group dynamics. Leaders should never begin a debate by stating what they think. This only serves to suppress other opinions. The dissenting opinions must be encouraged and should be considered respectfully and without bias. Understanding dissenting opinions always leads to better decision making. A well conducted meeting should allow a wide range of discussion but at the same time the leader must guide the group to keep the discussion focused on the agenda and on time. Two books to help Committee Chairs are How to Conduct Productive Meetings: Strategies, Tips and Tools to Ensure Your Next Meeting Is Well Planned and Effective and Groupthink: Psychological studies of policy decisions and fiascoes.

5. The Specialized Committee Chairs (Finance, Governance)

These committees require some specialize knowledge, accounting and not-for-profit governance. Most business schools conduct weekend seminars on these topics. Individual reading can also be sufficient for many who already have some understanding of the processes. Accounting for Dummies is actually a very good overview for accounting and Governance as Leadership is excellent as well.

6. Department Chair, Board of Director Members, and Presidential Line

Individuals selected to be a Department Chair or elected to the board of directors or Presidential Line of a PMA will be experienced in the committee process and will have achieved the previously mentioned skills as they moved through the organization. However, any gaps which an individual feels exist can be addressed by any of the above courses of action.

This is a suggested process to enhance leadership skills in orthopaedic departments and PMAs. Over time many refinements in the process can and should be made such as employing the occasional outside speaker for the Leadership Meetings. Nevertheless, thinking about the process of developing good orthopaedic leaders is worth the time and effort and will benefit both future orthopaedic surgeons and society.

Self Reading

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9. Janis IL Groupthink: Psychological studies of policy decisions and fiascoes Publisher: Houghton Mifflin; 2nd edition (1983) ISBN-10: 0395331897
10. Tracy JA Accounting for Dummies Publisher: For Dummies; 4 edition (June 3, 2008) ISBN-10: 0470246006
11. Chait RA et al Governance as Leadership Publisher: Wiley; 1 edition (October 22, 2004) ISBN-10: 0471684201