Reflections on Leadership
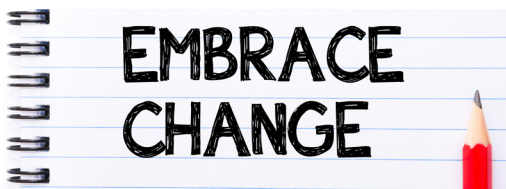
Change

The subject of change may be the most popular topic in the study of leadership. After all, if the world was a static place, there would be no need for leadership. The evidence and language of change is all around us – climate change, the need for political change, educational change, social change (positive and negative), technological change, demographic changes – pick almost any topic, and the change is the focal point of discussion. We live in a world of change – but this is nothing new. All of human history has been marked by how people live and adjust to the next wave of change. Those of us who are old enough to remember the 1960's recall the Bob Dylan classic "The Times They are a Changing" with lyrics that could be applied to events of almost every decade that has followed.

The subject of change has a personal dimension that is often associated with the New Year's holiday. Almost everyone I know aspires to change something in their life, and many of us use the change of calendar from one year to the next as the impetus to make a resolution of some kind. Many of these resolutions are centered on health – exercise, eating better, quitting smoking, etc. Others are related to personal relationships,

changing spending habits, setting aside time for recreation, personal reflection or spiritual development, and other subjects that fall under the general heading of personal discipline.

I believe that for anyone who aspires to be a leader - at work, home, church, or in the community - there is an intersection between personal change and organizational change. It is impossible for a leader to be good at fostering organizational change and leading their team in a new direction if he or she is unable to understand and apply the principles of personal change to their own lives. At the heart of change is a personal discipline that, once mastered, can be extended to include other people. The lessons of personal change can and should be essential tools that leaders use in their daily work.

How and What to Change

One of the more insightful books on the subject of personal change is the book *Triggers,* by Marshall Goldsmith. In response to the question "Why don't we become the person we want to be? He identifies what he calls two

immutable truths about behavioral change:

- **Meaningful change is very hard to do.** To those who doubt this truth, he asks three questions – What do you want to change in your life? How long has this been going on? How is that working out? These three questions conform to three problems related to introducing change. First, we cannot admit that we need to change – either because we are unaware that a change is desirable – or more likely that we have developed elaborate excuses for why change is not possible. Secondly, we do not appreciate the power of inertia. Finally, we don't know how to execute a change.

- **No one can make us change unless we truly want to change.** People may say that they want to change, but often they don't really mean it. This may be because the nature of the change comes with a price that we are unwilling to pay.

Goldsmith goes on to identify 15 "triggers" that stop behavioral change. But what is interesting to me is what is behind the 15 triggers he has identified as barriers. He claims that *"our inner beliefs trigger denial, resistance, and ultimately self-delusion… and these beliefs are more pernicious than excuses."* He also explains that *"An excuse explains why we fell short of expectations after the fact. Our inner beliefs trigger failure before it happens. They sabotage lasting change by canceling its possibility."*

This observation is breathtaking in its scope and impact. It is one thing to make a New Year's resolution with good intentions and a sense of discipline and fail to completely follow through. This is the reason that health clubs and fitness centers are crowded in January, February and March and thin out as the year progresses. But according to Goldsmith's theory, for every resolution that we make, there are others that we talk ourselves out of before we even try. So the first question that we should be asking of ourselves as we start the New Year is – "What is the thing (or things) that we need to change (personally or professionally) that we are inclined to talk ourselves out of because we have determined them to be beyond our reach?"

Learning and Failure

It has been my experience that human beings naturally shy away from addressing areas where they have failed before. This may be related to the attitude toward failure more than anything else. Instead of being threatened by failure, it should be embraced as an opportunity to learn.

In his new book, *Black Box Thinking*, Matthew Syed talks about the intellectual contortions that people engage in that limit the potential for progress. He observes *"If we edit our failure, if we reframe our mistakes, we are effectively destroying one of the most precious learning opportunities that exists."* He talks about the self-justification that people use to deceive themselves into thinking that they were victims of random events or placing the blame on someone else, concluding that *"Lying to oneself destroys the very possibility of learning."* To illustrate his point, Syed contrasts the attitudes on learning from

failure in the airline industry and health care. The results are striking. Over time the airline industry has experienced a continual improvement in safety, and health care has failed to reduce error rates that cost the lives of thousands of people annually. This raises a second question – How can each of us change our thinking in the coming year so that we can acknowledge failure and learn from it without becoming defensive or threatened?

Complexity

While the need for change has been constant throughout history, I do believe that we now face a level of complexity in many areas that complicate how we approach change. General Stanley McChrystal's book *Team of Teams* has focused on the need for agility, adaptability, and cohesion as necessary ingredients in adjusting to adversaries that constantly evolve and change tactics. His message, which has decidedly military overtones, can be applied broadly to personal and organizational change:

- **Efficiency is necessary, but no longer sufficient to be successful.** Just working harder at doing the

exact same things is more likely to increase stress and frustration than it is to achieve a better result.

- **Organizations (and individuals) must be networked, not siloed in order to succeed.** Improved communication is a key to change. McChrystal tells his colleagues to "communicate until you are afraid that it is illegal."

- **More data (big data) will not necessarily save us.** We have moved from a data poor but fairly predictable setting to a data rich uncertain one. To deal with complexity it is important to focus on what matters and to remove the extraneous. Whenever possible stick to a few key themes – sometimes less is more.

- **Adaptability is the key to the future.** McChrystal cites Henry Mintzberg, the author of *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning* – *"Setting oneself on a predetermined course is the perfect way to sail straight into an iceberg."* Leaders need to change from being a chess master, intent on making the right moves to being a gardener – shaping an ecosystem where plants (and individuals) can grow and adapt to constant change.

So the final New Year's question is – Are there steps that I can take to become more flexible in adapting to changes that are happening around me?

Whether it is personal, occupational, or societal, real change rarely, if ever, happens by accident. It requires focus, discipline, and hard work. Change is also not optional. It is a necessity in a world that is moving in new and often confusing directions.

Reflections on Leadership

PRESBYTERIAN SENIOR LIVING

Affirming the Mission

The Mission of Presbyterian Senior Living is to offer Christian understanding, compassion, and a sense of belonging to promote wholeness of body, mind and spirit.

This mission statement accurately reflects the founding values of PSL nearly 90 years ago, and has been regularly affirmed by the PSL Board since our inception in 1927. It has, and continues to inspire generations of staff in their daily work, as well as donors, and volunteers to give freely to support those with insufficient funds to pay for the care they need. The question that is frequently raised is - How is this mission statement applied in a world that is rapidly becoming more secular and dismissive of those individuals and institutions with faith based values?

All organizations are free to express their values and their reasons behind their purpose for being. Charitable, not-for-profit, tax-exempt organizations like Presbyterian Senior Living, who exist to serve the public good, have a long history of clearly articulating their mission and values. A mission statement that is forthright about underlying reasons for an organization's purpose is not disrespectful or exclusionary. Respecting the views of others does not mean that the PSL culture must be reduced to the lowest common denominator - the absence of faith of any kind. Furthermore, the proper application of the concept of inclusion is to see the world in

a broader way rather than to be offended by anyone who is different or holds different beliefs. For all of our history, PSL has had a family of both residents and staff made up of many cultures, religions, and ethnicities.

For an organization like PSL, our mission does not include persuading people with different beliefs to adopt the faith of our Presbyterian or Christian founders, and we do not permit people of any (or no) religious conviction to use the PSL environment as a platform to convince others of their point of view. Secondly, there are legal and practical limitations on how faith based values can be expressed. Particularly, they cannot be used as a reason to discriminate in terms of hiring, determining who we serve, and how we provide service to individuals – conduct that is not tolerated in any form or fashion.

That being said, PSL can require staff and volunteers to display behaviors that are consistent with our mission statement and values in their daily work, while affirming that someone's personal beliefs are their own business. This does not mean forcing people to pray, (we do not) but it does mean being respectful of those who do.

So in this context, what does the PSL mission mean when it uses the term Christian understanding? I believe that this term is best understood in light of the writings of the Apostle Paul in Galatians 5:22 – 23.

The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law.

These words accurately express the expectations PSL has for leaders and all staff as we serve seniors in this ministry. There are two other important features related to PSL's concept of Christian understanding. It is offered – not forced or required. No one associated with PSL as a staff member, volunteer, or person receiving service is expected to adopt Christian beliefs. Secondly – displaying any or all of the virtues described as the "fruit of the spirit" does not violate any legal requirement or lessen the respect that PSL holds for anyone who may claim another source for displaying these behaviors on the job.

A mission statement is important because every organization needs a strong foundation, and the absence of a strong foundation can have catastrophic results. This is vividly illustrated in the famous leaning

tower of Pisa in Italy. Situated behind the Cathedral in Pisa, the tower began leaning soon after the construction was initiated in 1173. Apparently the foundation was poorly laid. The tower is over 180 feet tall, and leans at an angle of just under 4%. While this does not sound like much, the tower's appearance next to the perfectly straight angles of the cathedral is striking.

However, the startling part of this story is that the architects and builders knew that the foundation was bad when the building began to lean after construction progressed on the third floor. Instead of taking the structure down and starting over, there was an attempt to correct the lean of the building - compensating for the tilt by making the higher floors with one side taller than the other. This caused the building to tilt in the other direction, so the shape of the tower is actually curved. Construction took over 177 years to complete. Efforts to stabilize it since then have cost millions of dollars. Yet for all of this effort, the tower remains a monument to what happens when the basic foundation of a building is bad.

In organizations as well as buildings the foundation must be right. That is why we spend so much time revisiting and reinforcing our mission, vision and values as our most deeply held beliefs.

The following is the formally adopted statement of vision and

values that accompany the PSL mission statement. Taken together with the PSL mission statement they define the essential elements of this ministry and how we intend to serve others.

VISION

To express the love of Christ and the understanding of scripture concerning the divine purpose in creation and the dignity of humankind.

ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES

1. **Christian** - PSL strives to provide services and living arrangements in a caring, and compassionate manner that is consistent with our Christian faith.

2. **Inclusive** - Reach out to include all persons in the communities in which we serve, as recipients of service, employees, and volunteers.

3. **Integrity** - Adhere to the highest standards of honesty, integrity, and impartiality to assure the public trust in the organization and its mission.

4. **Quality** - To enhance the quality of life of those we serve through the provision of exceptional services, maximize the options available to seniors, and empower them to choose the services that best meet their needs.

5. **Stewardship** - To be good stewards of the resources available to the organization with the goal of achieving the greatest good to the greatest number of seniors in the most cost effective manner possible.

6. **Environmental Sustainability** – Integrate sustainable construction and operational practices in every aspect of PSL's ministry.

7. **Transparency** – Create a transparent environment for the PSL leadership and all constituent groups regarding the organization and its mission.

8. **People** - Provide PSL staff and with a supportive, rewarding and challenging environment that gives opportunity for a satisfying work experience in the service of others.

9. **Volunteers** – Create a supportive environment in which volunteers can exercise creativity in serving others with enthusiasm and energy

10. **Community Benefit** – Provide support to local people, clubs, schools, churches, social service agencies, and governmental entities to strengthen the fabric of the communities we serve.

11. **Innovation** - apply innovation and state of the art technology to meet the needs of current and future residents.

12. **Collaboration** – Encourage the development of relationships with like-minded organizations and individuals to meet the needs of seniors.

From my perspective, it is important to continually articulate these expectations because virtues like compassion, empathy, humility, and serving others do not come naturally to human beings. Consistency of behavior requires roots that tap into something bigger – a source of nourishment that keeps these virtues alive and healthy in a society that rewards an entirely different set of values. Calling attention to these expectations also reflects our commitment to transparency and authenticity.

As we start a new year in 2016 it is important that we recommit ourselves to building on a strong foundation. Mission matters!

Reflections on Leadership

PRESBYTERIAN
SENIOR LIVING

Love and Leadership

February 2016

February is the month that contains our only specifically designated romantic holiday - Valentine's Day. I have been keenly aware of the importance of this day for most of my life, as my wife and I were married 45 years ago on February 12th, 1971. Like most guys, I have a poor track record for remembering things. Having this holiday so close to our anniversary has been a big help in making sure that I don't accidentally overlook the most significant event in my life. Over the years we have celebrated our anniversary and Valentine's Day at the same time, so Valentine's Day has always been recognized as an important occasion.

If you are inclined to watch the Hallmark Channel you would think that, after Thanksgiving and Christmas, the most celebrated holiday of the year is Valentine's Day. In the weeks leading up to Valentine's Day there are a series of entirely predictable, "feel good" love stories. There are certain common themes – a jilted man or woman recovering from a broken relationship, a widow or widower, a small child, a dog (or some other lovable pet), or a long lost ex-boyfriend or girlfriend that reconnect. To add some uncertainty to the script, a shallow or insincere love interest that is discovered just in time to avoid disaster. The movie always concludes with the two star crossed lovers in a brief hug or kiss. Such is the romanticized version of love that surrounds this date.

But the dimensions of love are much more complex than what is commercially successful in movies or television. Human beings are not perfect, and the people we love most in this life may test our patience from time to time. Love is a much deeper emotion than the romantic feeling of the moment, and in its best form is an enduring commitment that does not fade with the passage of time. C. S. Lewis, in his book **The Four Loves**, explored the various dimensions of love. In addition to affection, friendship, and romantic love, he identified the Greek word agape to describe what he believed was the highest level of love known to humanity – a selfless love, a love that was passionately committed to the well-being of the other.

The most familiar definition of love is a Biblical passage from I Corinthians (13:4-7, 13), which is read at nearly every wedding ceremony. It presents a comprehensive picture of what love is all about:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres… And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

This definition of love is the gold standard that every person should strive for in all relationships – within their family, church, community, and work environment. It is not an overstatement to claim that practicing this kind of love has the power to transform the world in which we live.

How does the subject of love relate to the question of leadership? I believe that servant leadership is the most obvious connection between love and leadership. Servant leadership is one of the four attributes that we aspire to as fundamental to PSL's leadership culture. The concept of servant leadership is taken directly from the words of Jesus, who told his disciples that as their leader and teacher, he was *"among them as one who serves"*. In this context, I believe that true servant leadership and love are completely intertwined. If you think that is an exaggeration, reread the words of I Corinthians Chapter13, replacing "love is" with "servant leaders are".

Love and Leadership

Servant leaders - are patient, kind, are not given to envy, are not boastful, not self-serving, are not easily angered, keep no record of wrongs, do not delight in evil, are truthful, protect, trust, persevere…

The Biblical description of love and the application of those same words to servant leadership are striking. The lesson is unmistakable – servant leaders love people. Love is the heart of servant leadership, and servant leadership is at the heart of a healthy leadership culture.

How can we tell if the love modeled by servant leaders is prevalent in an organization? It is reflected in an environment where people care about each other as human beings – where they are understood, are treated with kindness, and where they feel they belong. As leaders, we set the tone for creating and sustaining this kind of environment.

Not everyone is eager to recognize the connection between love and leadership. Many in our country who hold positions of leadership or aspire to lead in the public arena display behavior that appears to be the polar opposite of a servant leader as described by the words of love - impatient, unkind, boastful, self-serving, easily angered, vengeful, untruthful, or untrustworthy.

Even the proponents of character driven leadership appear ambivalent toward using love, substituting terms like "actively caring for others" in its place. In his book the **Heart Led Leader,** Tommy Spaulding makes this observation, *"If the word love scares you, then use passion, commitment, compassion, servant leadership, purpose driven, mission driven, or your choice of any similar word or phrase, because at the core these are all forms of love. In this context, love is simply an unselfish and genuine concern for the good of others."* I am not sure that I completely agree with the idea that all of these words are completely interchangeable with the idea of love, but it is better than avoiding the connection between love and leadership altogether.

In his book **"Love Leadership: The New Way to Lead in a Fear-Based World"**, John Hope Bryant contends that *"There are only two basic ways to lead, because there are only two primal forces in the human psyche: love and fear. What you don't love, you fear… The trouble with the world today is that most leaders choose fear rather than love as their primary source of leadership."* He goes on to state that *"Love Leadership is a way of thinking and acting that turns vulnerability into power. When you open yourself up to others, people will open up to you, because vulnerability is the door to your heart. Great power is given to those who are strong enough to leave the door to their heart open to others."*

Valentine's Day is coming soon. Don't forget to pay attention to those you love on that special occasion. But aside from the romantic feelings that are associated with the day, use it as a constant reminder to express love to those around you in the form of a "passionate commitment to the well-being of others".

Reflections on Leadership

PRESBYTERIAN SENIOR LIVING

Family Portraits

March 2016

The term family is one of the most beloved words in the English language. At its best it evokes images of warmth, acceptance and belonging. There are many illustrations of family, and I would like to share a few that have meaning for me.

Every couple of years we get our children and grandchildren together for a family portrait, and this past Christmas was one of those occasions. This is a fairly complicated process, as it now involves a total of fourteen people. Getting six grandchildren of various ages to sit still and smile at the same time is no small feat, but seeing the final result is always a joyful experience. As we put the new photos on the wall in the hallway of our family home, we compare them with the photos that they are replacing. In some years we have added new family members to the growing brood, but even when the numbers remain the same, we marvel at how everyone has grown and changed. In addition to these contemporary photos we have older photographs of parents and grandparents – many in black in white - that add a sense of history.

At PSL's 75th anniversary in 2002 we searched the archives to retrieve photos from our history to create a collection of large 2 ½ by 6 foot banners to form a traveling exhibit called the Faces of Aging. It was such a wonderful and heartwarming collection that we decided to take 50 of these photographs and mount them on the walls of our office as a reminder of our history and the people we were called to serve. In many respects they are like the family portraits we have at home where we can see the passage of time and important faces from the PSL family.

Recently my wife and I decided to have breakfast at a small diner down the street from the hotel where we were staying on vacation. When we arrived at 8:00 in the morning we were surprised to find a beehive of activity, with what could only be described as a family reunion like atmosphere. Almost everyone in the place was on a first name basis. Sometimes the servers bypassed the order taking process, simply bringing out what they knew to be the usual order for a regular customer. We heard the hostess express concern to a customer she had not seen in the past week, inquiring if he had been out of town or under the weather. I remarked to Rhonda that if we lived in this neighborhood that this would be our home away from home.

When I travel with my friend Ryan Keith, the CEO of Forgotten Voices International, there are many occasions where greetings are heartfelt and joyful. Hugs are exchanged with our "brothers by

another mother" who live thousands of miles away. Conversations are animated. In a very real sense, there is a family connection that is created from a common experience, commitment, and shared faith. In our travels together we have taken many photos of these treasured moments.
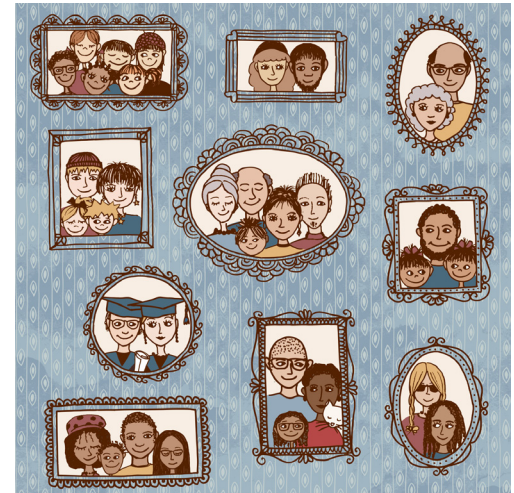
All of these situations describe a sense of family. We belong to families by birth. A common ancestry can be a powerful connection that is truth behind the observation that blood is thicker than water. But there are other family-like relationships that engender similar feelings. Families can be by birth or by choice.

So how does the concept of family fit into the topic of leadership? Whether we like it or not, the workplace is a natural family environment. People work for a lot of reasons, including the financial support to their families, fulfilling a calling to help others, having something interesting to do with their time, experiencing a sense of fulfillment that accompanies

achievement, or providing a needed social outlet. To some degree, all of these things are essential ingredients for a satisfying life. Creating a sense of family in a group of people who choose to work together is the best way to achieve these tangible and intangible benefits.

When leaders talk about creating a sense of family in the work place, what are they referring to? From my perspective, there are several common themes:

- A genuine interest and concern in the person – not just the position as a staff member or customer or their usefulness to you or the rest of the team.

- Willingness to be helpful when the chips are down. Being a part of a support network that extends beyond the workplace.

- Genuine happiness for another's good fortune and success, and participation in the celebration of special occasions.

- Patience – taking time to listen and learn about those around you and to respond with kindness and compassion.

- Playfulness – the presence of laughter and the presence of humor that is uplifting and affirming. This does not include humor at another's expense or diminishes another person in any way.

How can we tell when we are in the presence of this kind of family? One of my favorite job responsibilities is taking part in staff recognition events. This is a fairly common experience for me, and one that I enjoy immensely. Often I get the privilege of sharing a table with front line staff and see firsthand the sense of family as they relate to each other. Much of the conversation is about their children and grandchildren,

the passage of time, and how good it is to have long term relationships with the people they work with. Some of the stories are so compelling and vivid that they are etched in my mind forever.

One such occasion occurred many years ago when a staff person receiving a service pin spoke about losing her teenage son in a tragic car accident. She went on to explain how her work family helped her in this difficult time.

"I don't think I could have gotten through that experience without the people here at work. You surrounded me with love. When we did not have enough money to pay for my son's funeral expenses, the staff raised money through bake sales and contributions to cover the costs. I believe that God led me to work here because he knew that this is a place I would get the support to sustain me. I don't know what I would do without all of you."

These extraordinary types of support occur more often than we would like to believe. But often the sense of support is less dramatic. The recent 30 plus inch snow storm provided many opportunities to experience a family-like connection. Staff members stayed overnight and worked extra shifts so that our residents would be safe and secure. Residents and staff were patient with each other in the face of hardship, flexibility and teamwork was evident across departmental lines, and a sense of humor to lighten up the moment seemed to appear at the right time. Letters of appreciation received

from residents after the snowstorm confirmed the extraordinary effort.

There are unique complications to creating a sense of family in the work place. Everyone has a different comfort level in disclosing personal matters to their co-workers. It is a leadership challenge to include team members in a positive atmosphere without being overly intrusive. Also, leaders are not parents in the workplace. The family experience at work is one of equals - not the assigned roles of parent and child.

In spite of the overwhelming evidence of the benefits of creating a family experience in the work place, it would be a mistake to completely romanticize the family experience. Families are not perfect, can be messy, and sometimes even dysfunctional. We find this to be true in our birth families as well as our chosen families. The snowstorm ends, and we return to our normal work pace. The person who needs our help in a moment of crisis may still have irritating habits that bother us. What sustains families through all of the ups and downs of life is something beyond a good feeling. Behind every family portrait is the intentional commitment of people who care deeply about each other. The photo may capture the shining moment, but the staying power of the successful family takes hard work.

My hope is that you are all blessed with the joy of being a part of a family - both at home and in the workplace. If you are a leader, I would encourage you to intentionally reach out to your team members to create a sense of closeness and support in their family by choice.

Blessings,

Reflections on Leadership

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Anger Management

April 2016

If we are to believe the political and social pundits of our day, we live in a time that is often described as angry. There is anger at elected officials that do not pay attention to the desires of their constituents; anger at those who disagree with us on the solutions to the problems of our day; anger at those who are intolerant toward those who share our views; anger at the growing disparity of income and wealth in our society; anger at the political correctness that restricts open dialogue on areas of disagreement; anger at those who express their anger by exhibiting disruptive behavior; anger at those who encourage aggressive behavior toward those with whom they disagree; anger at anyone who seems willing to compromise on important principles rather than stand up for what they believe; and anger at the gridlock that is the byproduct of opposing forces that are unwilling to compromise. The list could go on and on.

But anger is not just an abstract idea. We often see it up close in airports, on the highways, in restaurants and hospitals – anywhere where people come in contact with each other. Sometimes it surfaces in the provision of services to seniors. We also know from personal experience that some people are more naturally prone to anger than others. Groups like the Mayo Clinic have developed techniques to deal with anger on a personal level, and individualized professional help may

be required in more extreme and persistent circumstances.

While we may not be able to transform the angry environment around us, it is helpful to explore the emotion of anger, how it affects people in leadership positions, and what leaders can do to set a more positive tone in an environment where people need to work together toward a common goal.
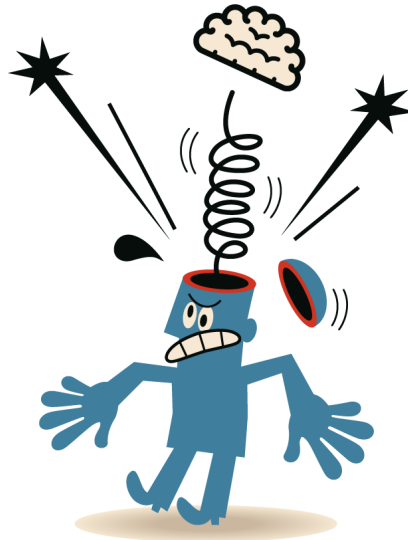
The first step is to recognize that everyone has the capacity to become angry. No one is immune because it is a part of the human experience. Moses - my personal hero as a leader - personified patience and dignity as the leader of a newly forming nation. He was uniquely described in the book of Numbers as meek (or humble) and in the book of Deuteronomy as someone whom *"the Lord knew face to face"*. Early in his life he impulsively killed a task master who was beating one of his people, an act that led to his

spending 40 years in the wilderness. Many years later in a moment of anger over the complaints and rebellion of his thirsty followers, this paragon of virtue struck the rock twice to obtain water, which resulted in his being denied entry into the promised land. Anger can afflict any person and result in terrible consequences.

Secondly, there is great advantage for the leader who can avoid anger in the most extreme circumstances. Nelson Mandella, who was imprisoned in South Africa under apartheid for 27 years, had every right to be angry and bitter based on the treatment he had received. His character as a leader is revealed in two profound observations –

"As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison."

"Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies."

These insights prevented the angry response and retribution that could have defined his time of leadership as South Africa's first democratically

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elected president as the head of the Government of National Unity in 1994. Instead he presided over the transition from minority rule and apartheid, winning international respect for his advocacy of national and international reconciliation.

Thirdly, it is my belief that the nearly all positive attributes required for effective leadership cannot survive in the presence of anger. This is especially true of servant leadership, one of PSL's core leadership values. Notice the contrast between anger and the following definition of servant leadership from the February issue of Reflections on Leadership:

Servant leaders - are patient, kind, are not given to envy, are not boastful, not self-serving, are not easily angered, keep no record of wrongs, do not delight in evil, are truthful, protect, trust, persevere…

This is confirmed by two Biblical references, one from the book of Proverbs *"People with understanding control their anger; a hot temper shows great foolishness."* (Proverbs 14:29), and from the New Testament book of James – *"Be slow to speak and slow to anger"* (James 1:19). But perhaps the harshest words regarding anger come from the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount in the Book of Matthew (v 21 – 22) where he compares the emotion of anger with murder.

So how do we follow these examples and directions in our day to day responsibilities as leaders? Here are a few practical suggestions:

- When you recognize anger in yourself or those around you – take a break or try to diffuse the anger so that a clear headed discussion can be held.

- Do not use fear or anger to get what you want – both are difficult to control, and there are always unintended consequences that will come back to haunt you later.

- Never make an important decision when you are angry. Delay a final decision until you can look at the circumstances through a less emotional lens.

- When in doubt about your own objectivity, use the counsel of someone you trust to help determine if you are overreacting to the circumstances before you.

- Do not give in to those who use anger as a primary tool in their relationship with others. This only rewards bad behavior and dooms you to repeat the experience in the future, only with a different set of circumstances.

- Provide constructive outlets for divergent opinions, even for controversial topics.

- Insist on a respectful tone in communications between your team members by setting down ground rules for a healthy dialogue.

- When working with your team, do not let angry team members dominate the conversation or override the more introverted or less forceful members of your team.

- Do not be afraid to intervene to protect your team members

from taking the brunt of angry or disrespectful behavior from other staff or customers.

- It is good to resolve differences as soon as possible. Harboring anger only leads to bitterness. The Apostle Paul's words from the book of Ephesians are instructive in this regard – *"Do not let the sun go down on your anger."*

There are a so few occasions where the use of anger is appropriate that I will not attempt to explain its constructive uses other than to say that there is such a thing as righteous anger – a characteristic usually attributed to God. Unfortunately when expressed by human beings, it almost always takes the form of self-righteous anger – less virtuous in form and inherently more destructive than righteous anger.

Finally, it has been my experience that whenever a leader takes action in anger, there is a high probability of a poor decision or negative outcome. Maintaining a sense of equilibrium when others are driven by anger or impulse is widely admired and the clear mark of a mature leader.

Reflections on Leadership

PRESBYTERIAN SENIOR LIVING

Leadership and Hope

May 2016

"Hope springs eternal from the human breast" - Alexander Pope's famous line from **An Essay on Man**, strikes a chord with me at a very deep level. We not only have hope for ourselves and for those we love in our day to day living, we are also inspired by stories of people who overcome great difficulty and enormous odds, never giving up hope, even when others around them gave in to despair. One such story is the story of Corrie ten Boom, a Dutch Christian who, along with her father and other family members, helped many Jews escape the Nazi Holocaust during World War II. Imprisoned for her actions, her most famous book, **The Hiding Place**, describes a journey of faith and hope as she lived through a horrible ordeal.

Hope. *To cherish a desire with anticipation. Assurance in the possibility that what one desires or longs for will happen* (**Webster**). It seems that some people are able to tap into the power of hope as a way to move forward to overcome obstacles and achieve great things, while others are driven into hopelessness and despair by the same set of circumstances. This reality raises a number of questions:

- Is hopefulness an intrinsic part of someone's character or can it be cultivated and learned?
- What is the source of resilient hope?

- Is it important for a leader to be a hopeful person?
- How can a leader create a hopeful atmosphere for his or her team members in their daily work?

The evidence suggests that hopelessness and hope can both be learned. In my college years I recall reading a study that involved placing a pike (a voracious predatory fish) in a tank that was separated into two parts by a glass partition – one containing minnows, and the other containing the pike. After some time interval and many unsuccessful attempts to reach the minnows, the pike's feeding instincts ceased completely. It became hopeless. Even when the glass partition was removed and the minnows were easily accessible, the pike did not feed and ultimately starved.

While acknowledging a person's basic inclinations, a number of authors talk about ways to nurture hope in children, how to engage in hope building exercises, and adopt other hope restoring strategies.

Hope may come more naturally to some people than others, but there is ample evidence that attitudes and human behavior in this area can be changed over time. Hope like many other positive attributes can be cultivated.

What do people who study hope have to say about where hope comes from and how it is practically used? C. Richard Snyder published six books about Hope Theory, and over 260 articles about the impact that hope can have on aspects of life such as health, work, education, and personal meaning. He defined hope as *"an emotional state accompanied by clear thoughts about what the future can be and how to get there"*. He contends that there are three main things that make up hopeful thinking:

- Goals – Approaching life in a goal-oriented way,
- Pathways – Finding different ways to achieve your goals,
- Agency – Believing that you can instigate change and achieve these goals.

Anthony Scioli in his book, **Hope in the Age of Anxiety** says that, *"The science of hope comprises two divergent traditions: one that has focused hope on the individual, and other that highlights external sources of hope."* Combining these two points of view it would strongly suggest that hope is more than just a feeling. It also contains an element of action and a definite external source.

Noted leadership author Richard Boyatzis sees hope as a key part of what he calls "Resonant Leadership". He asks the question *"Does the leader create an overall positive emotional tone that is characterized by hope?"* From his perspective hope is an essential ingredient in leadership. Leaders must have hope, because hopeless people generally lack energy and purpose and cannot inspire others to move together in a positive direction. Applying hopefulness to a leader's behavior, he says that leaders who demonstrate hope provide 3 key lessons:

- The leader needs to have dreams and aspirations, but also be in touch with those of the people around him or her. This helps to form the desired image of the future.

- The leader needs to be optimistic and believe in his or her ability to make a change.

- The leader must see the desired result as realistic and feasible.

These keys to hope and leadership hold up pretty well when things are going smoothly. But what about the times when hope is harder to come by – when morale is down and the team is facing an uphill climb?

In his classic leadership book, **Good to Great**, Jim Collins refers to the "hardiness factor" as one of the reasons that some organizations

prevail and succeed while other companies fail. His most vivid example of this hardiness factor was something he called the Stockdale Paradox. He describes his interview with Admiral Jim Stockdale, who survived 8 years of imprisonment and torture during the Viet Nam war. When he asked Stockdale about how he was able to deal with the circumstances, he replied, *"I never lost faith in the end of the story. I never doubted not only that I would get out, but also that I would prevail in the end and turn the experience into the defining event of my life, which in retrospect, I would not trade."*

But the startling thing about Stockdale's story was that he observed that the optimists were the ones who did not make it out, stating that *"You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end – which you can never afford to lose – with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they may be."* Herein lies the paradox - Retain faith that you will prevail while confronting the stark reality of the circumstances. Hope must never be separated from reality.

Looking at the intersection between hope and leadership I have a few personal observations:

- The absence of hope can be overwhelming personally and professionally. This truth has been recognized for thousands of years. Proverbs 13:12 says that *"Hope deferred makes the heart sick."*

- Anyone can become a source of hope for another person. A word of encouragement offered at the right time can do wonders.

- Hope does not appear on command. Hope has deep roots in the human psyche, and must

be encouraged before adverse circumstances arrive. The Apostle Paul, whose life story was a case study in surviving difficult circumstances wrote that *"Endurance produces character, and character produces hope."* (Romans 5:4 ESV).

- Successful leaders find ways to cultivate hope in themselves and their team members. But providing hope is not just a leader's responsibility. Hope and strength often comes from sharing a burden with others rather than bearing it alone.

- Sustaining hope requires an external source, and faith is the way human beings tap into an external source of hope. The Apostle Paul also wrote that *"Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."* (Hebrews 11:1 KJV). This is the essential truth of the Stockdale Paradox. Optimism without faith is hope without substance. This is why optimism is fragile, and faith based hope is resilient.

In my experience, the role of hope in leadership cannot be overstated. The vision to move boldly into an uncertain future requires hope. The courage to embrace change depends on hope. The trust that is essential to all human relationships is based on hope.

I believe that Martin Luther King, Jr. said it best – *"Everything that is done in the world is done by hope."*

Reflections on Leadership

Generous Leadership

June 2016

The June 2012 issue of Reflections on Leadership focused on generosity as one of the key attributes of leaders. It is still a pretty good read for being 4 years old, and for those who may be interested, it is can be accessed on the PSL web site under About us, Information and Financials, Reflections on Leadership, 2012 archive, June. Recently I had the opportunity to read Adam Grant's book *Give and Take, A Revolutionary Approach to Success,* and felt compelled to add to those earlier thoughts on generosity.

Grant's book explores the connection between success and giving attitudes in the work place. As a part of his study he divides people into three distinct groups related to generosity – Givers, Takers and Matchers. Weaving stories of each group taken from the business environment he illustrates the behavior of each.

Takers are those who see the world as a win / lose proposition. Typically they are take charge people - tough

negotiators, who focus on winning at all costs. Takers ask for and accept favors, and may occasionally do something positive for someone else. But they primarily work with others only to the extent that they can gain competitive advantage in the workplace. Givers on the other hand will go out of their way to be helpful. They are generous with their time and attention, even to those who have little or no opportunity to do anything beneficial in return. Matchers are those who will give to benefit others, but they keep score, expecting everything to eventually even out. They will behave as givers to a point, but they anticipate the possibility something in return.

The essential question that Grant poses is "Which of these three groups tend to be the most successful leaders, and what are the reasons for their success? What he found was that:

- Takers were the least successful in the long run.

- Matchers were in the middle in terms of performance

- Givers were found to be the most and least successful

Takers could be charming – especially to superiors at work. But this was in contrast to the attitude toward their peers and subordinates, described in a Dutch phrase - "kissing up and kicking down". The takers were the least successful in the long run because all of the matchers they worked with eventually stopped going out of their way to collaborate or assist them in any

way. Eventually they succeeded only in areas when they did not need help from anyone else.

Matchers were more successful than the takers. Operating within well understood, but often unspoken limits, they worked well with those who viewed giving and receiving as a two way street or a series of exchanges. The phrase "What goes around, comes around" would describe their expectations.

While the outcome on the takers and matchers was expected, the puzzle was why the givers were both the most and least successful leaders. It turns out that the least successful were indiscriminate, unfocused givers who were so willing to do for others that they neglected the essential tasks and responsibilities of their job. The most successful were able to be more productive by becoming what Grant called "otherish". They still gave freely, but they were more focused in their giving and recognized the importance of protecting their own well-being.

Grant's findings resonate with my experience as a leader. The most successful leaders are givers that are distinguished by a few key behaviors:

- **Mentoring** is one of the key markers of a giving focused leader. This behavior has an immediate effect as well as a long lasting legacy. Every successful leader that I know can describe at least one mentor that provided encouragement and support without any expectation of benefit or personal gain.

- **The ability to learn.** Giving leaders see their time with other people as a learning experience. This genuine interest enables them to understand what other people are thinking and might need, opening their vision to connections and insights that takers and matchers often miss.

- **Trust** is the glue that holds people together in good times and in bad. Givers build trust and goodwill through a combination of helpfulness and genuine concern for those around them. By taking the risk to become vulnerable, unconditional givers demonstrate that they are trustworthy and set the tone for matchers who may be reluctant to take the first step.

- **Collaboration** is a requirement in solving complex problems, finding novel and innovative solutions, or adjusting to rapidly changing conditions. If this describes your work environment, a giving culture is the key to your future. Issues like who gets credit for success or the blame for failure requires a healthy measure of personal generosity, willingness to share, and to celebrate the success of others. Grant would argue that true collaboration cannot exist without givers on the team.

- **Loyalty** – Giving leaders inspire a loyalty in those around them based in genuine respect.

What can we do as leaders to foster a culture of giving in the work place?

First - Model giving behavior by being generous with your time and attention. Reach out to help those who clearly cannot reciprocate.

Second - Build teams filled with givers and matchers. This means finding ways in an interview process to identify taking, giving and matching tendencies in the selection process. Every leader has a story of hiring an extremely talented individual whose self-centeredness (a classic taker behavior) was a detriment to the team and entire organization. Look for individuals who have demonstrated the capacity for cooperation and collaboration and you will find givers and matchers.

Third - Focus your praise on effective teamwork rather than just calling attention to individual star performers. Reward giving behavior - like mentoring and providing help across normal departmental lines of authority.

Fourth - Find a place to volunteer. Civic, community, or church groups are always looking for help – on the front line and in leadership roles. Gaining experience as a board member outside your particular area of expertise can expand your horizons and help you to learn and grow in important ways.

The impact of a giving attitude is not just confined to the workplace or desirable attributes of leaders. Being a giver has deeply spiritual roots.

One man gives freely, yet gains even more. Another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper. He who refreshers others will himself be refreshed. (Proverbs 11:24, 25 KJV) *A gift opens the way for the giver and ushers him into the presence of the great.* (Proverbs 18:16 KJV)

And the words of Jesus clearly expressthe reciprocal nature of giving and receiving in Luke 6:38 – *Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap* (KJV).

Finally, I have learned that true generosity is within reach for nearly every person. Several months ago I was traveling in Africa on a mission trip, visiting a church in a very poor area in Zimbabwe. Meeting with church leaders we heard how they were responding to the needs of children orphaned by AIDS in their region. A significant number of their congregation members had taken orphans into their homes in spite of the fact that they were living on an average of about $3 a day. But that was not all. They spoke of an outreach ministry to a group of people about 30 miles away, where the conditions were worse. It was truly humbling to observe such generosity in the poorest of the poor.

Every human being has a unique combination of time, talent, and resources available. Being a giving leader may not come naturally to everyone, but it is an impulse that can be cultivated and strengthened.

Generosity is also personally good for us as individuals. Studies have shown that giving actually feels good, and volunteers are happier and live longer. So, if you want to be a better leader and live a longer and happier life, become an "otherish" giver.

Reflections on Leadership

Leadership and Pride

Pride may be one of the most prominent of all leadership faults, and one of the least frequently addressed. I was reminded of this recently when I received an e- mail from an organization that I knew nothing about, informing me that I had been selected (along with a group of other leaders) to be recognized as CEO of the year. This was a puzzle to me, since it was a company located outside of the US. I later discovered that this was what could be described as a recognition company, providing plaques, and awards (for a fee) and even sponsoring gatherings for those who were selected and chose to spend a relatively large sum to attend a recognition event. The entire marketing approach focused on appealing to the prideful leader, who should be thrilled to be getting the recognition that he or she deserved.

Pride has two distinct faces. The positive face of pride is contentment with oneself or those around you based on achievement. Often it is directed toward others – like our family or those we work with. As leaders we often praise others to specifically encourage them to be proud of doing the right thing. In this context pride is described as a, "feeling or deep pleasure or satisfaction derived from one's own achievements, the achievements of those with whom one is closely associated, or from qualities that are widely admired"

But there is a negative and more common face of pride that often afflicts leaders – an exaggerated sense of personal value, status, or accomplishments. The negative version of pride is considered on almost every list as one of the seven deadly sins, even being labeled as the father of all sins. The ancient Greeks identified pride as "the dangerously foolish absence of humility and corrupt selfishness, the putting of one's own desires, urges, wants, and whims before the welfare of people." St. Augustine captured the heart of pride in a single phrase, "the love of one's own excellence". The modern definition of pride has also come to include a gross over-estimation of one's abilities and is used synonymously with hubris.

John Maxwell, the noted writer of leadership books states it plainly: "*There are two kinds of pride, both good and bad. 'Good pride' represents our dignity and self-respect. 'Bad pride' is the deadly sin of superiority that reeks of conceit and arrogance.*"

It appears that pride is deeply imbedded in the human experience. C.S. Lewis, the great theologian and author, wrote that pride leads to every other vice. In his classic novel, *Screwtape Letters*, Lewis uses a series of letters from a senior demon (Screwtape) to his nephew and junior tempter (Wormwood) on the best ways to tempt his British human subject (referred to as his patient). Screwtape remarks:

"Your patient has become humble; have you drawn his attention to the fact? All virtues are less formidable to us once the man is aware that he has them, but this is especially true of humility. Catch him at the moment when he is really poor in spirit and smuggle into his mind the gratifying reflection, "By jove! I'm being humble", and almost immediately pride—pride at his own humility—will appear."

If even the virtue of humility can be corrupted by pride, no human being is immune from the dangers of pride's corrosive powers.

I believe that leaders are particularly vulnerable to pride because we are often given the credit for success that belongs to a team of individuals. It is easy to overlook the role of teamwork when others are sending the message that the lion's share of the credit belongs to the charismatic leader. At the same time a strong leadership personality that is naturally inclined to strive for success is at greater risk being personally proud when a goal is reached.

Leadership and Pride

The dangers of pride to an organization cannot be underestimated. In his book *Operational Risk Management*, Mark Abkowitz provides 18 case studies of disasters that illustrate the common causes of risks that were behind catastrophic events. Many of these situations have become shorthand for disaster – Bhopal, Chernobyl, Challenger / Columbia, USS Cole, and the Edmund Fitzgerald. He identifies 10 common causes of these tragic events. In 8 of the 18 case studies, arrogance – either as part of the organization's culture or the attitude of leadership, played a prominent role in these terrible outcomes. The effects go well beyond whether a business enterprise succeeded or failed. People died.

Specifically, what kind of destructive behavior does pride inspire?

- Underestimation of risk.
- Overconfidence in the ability to handle changing conditions.
- Unwillingness to ask for help.
- Over aggressive planning for success.
- Hyper competitiveness within and outside of the organization.
- A critical spirit toward others with whom you feel a sense of competition.
- Embracing the "not invented here syndrome" which inhibits the ability to learn and adapt.
- Impatience - focus on a short term "winning strategy" at the expense of a better long term solution.
- Inability to recognize or appreciate the accomplishments or contributions of others.
- Taking credit for the work of others.
- Becoming self-satisfied – leading to laziness (Sloth).

Jim Collins identifies pride as the first step toward failure in his book *How the Mighty Fall*. He calls it *"Hubris Born of Success"*, but it is essentially the same as St. Augustine's definition of *"the love of one's own excellence"*. While the results are less dramatic than the disasters that make the headlines, they are no less compelling stories that illustrate the effects of pride. Pride is a sneaky character, often unrecognized until it is too late. Reading Collins book again recently, I recalled my favorite quote from Ernest Hemmingway's novel, *The Sun Also Rises*: *"How did you go bankrupt? Two ways. Gradually then suddenly."* Pride is often the main character in the "gradually" part of the story.

So how do we resist the powerful draw of pride that is lurking around every corner?

- Embrace humility as a primary component in your leadership style, using the C.S. Lewis definition - *"True humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less"*.
- Develop and communicate a genuine and consistent appreciation of the contributions of others. One way to do this is by concentrating on being what Adam Grant described as an "otherish giver".
- Take swift action when you see the symptoms of pride that are articulated above, and call on your team members to be on the lookout for the insidious ways that pride can undermine everything the organization stands for.
- Identify any symbols of rank and privilege that feed the tendencies of pride in yourself and the leaders around you and do everything possible to eliminate them from the work place.
- Frequently communicate the negative effects of pride on the personal relationships and organizational performance. "*When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humble spirit is wisdom* (Proverbs 11:2 ESV). *Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall* (Proverbs 16:18 ESV). "

Finally, I believe that embracing the positive face of pride is a great way to crowd out the destructive impact of pride within ourselves and our organization. Leaders who are generous with their praise of others and derive genuine satisfaction from the accomplishments of their team members have little room for the kind of pride that is destructive by its very nature. Given the combination of time and consistency, this kind of leadership by example will permeate the entire organization and lessen the risk of prideful arrogance.

Reflections on Leadership

Lessons from Baseball

When I was a youngster, baseball was truly America's pastime. This was not just based on the comparative attendance figures of all major league sports teams, television ratings, or even because of the thousands of young people involved in little league and other organized sports programs. Baseball was played in literally every neighborhood. In cities vacant lots attracted children to set up makeshift games. In urban settings stickball was played as a pick-up game in places like New York City and Philadelphia, using a broom handle and a rubber ball of some kind. Throughout the summer in all of these diverse settings, kids would arrive and spontaneously divide up into teams and the game was on.

The images of baseball seemed to be everywhere. In those days parents spent time teaching their children how to catch and throw a baseball, creating a special connection between generations. This was powerfully illustrated in the final scene of the movie *Field of Dreams*, when Kevin Costner's deceased father returns to play catch with his now adult son. Even the General Motors advertising program of the 1970's emphasized the company's all American credentials with a slogan and jingle – "Baseball, hot dogs, apple pie, and Chevrolet". Most of the kids in my neighborhood collected baseball cards and could recite the statistics of their favorite players.

Times have changed, and the sports scene has become more diverse. Football, basketball, and soccer have taken center stage. All sports for children have become more organized, and there are fewer spontaneous expressions that would mirror the experience of my youth. Recently I was watching my young granddaughter's baseball game and realized that over the years I have changed. While I loved to see her out on the field and witness her enthusiasm for the game, baseball seemed slower and less interesting than I remembered when I was her age.

This life experience with baseball is why a recent article in the Wall Street Journal attracted my attention. It was entitled "What Baseball Can Really Teach Kids". The Author, Jason Gay, described a program called Harlem RBI. He described the program as "an innovative education program and state of the art charter school, with thousands of lives impacted in both East Harlem and the Bronx, and young boys and girls clamoring to join up." The stories of how this program has changed lives are compelling, and Gay goes on to offer some thoughts on why the program has integrated baseball into its core curriculum, and what baseball can teach children about life.

Reading this article caused me to think about the lessons from baseball that have endured to influence how I

approach work and leadership. Many of these reflections mirror Gay's observations, but I have a few of my own thoughts to add to his list.

Failure. Dealing with failure is an essential part of playing baseball. The very best baseball players fail 70% of the time they come to the plate to face an opposing pitcher. In order to survive, a baseball player must be able to keep from getting discouraged and giving up. Being able to put failure behind and look ahead with optimism toward the next opportunity is essential.

Patience and Perseverance are required whenever failure is a frequent occurrence. The temptation to become discouraged to the point of giving up is common to every person. But the presence of patience and perseverance translates every unsuccessful try into an opportunity to get a little better, and views mistakes as opportunities to learn and grow. The life applications are all around us, but none are more vivid

than in the lives of famous inventors like Thomas Edison, whose success was marked by patience and perseverance beyond any other virtue he may have possessed.

Paying attention – understanding the value of being alert. My son's favorite baseball coach in little league was John Flanagan, whose focus with his team of 10 year old boys was all about paying attention. John would tell his team - "I do not have a problem with any of you making an error, as long as you are paying attention and trying to do your best". He knew that the pace of a baseball game could include slow periods where the mind could wander. The ability to spring into action at the right time was based on readiness. In that respect, baseball is a metaphor for all of life.

Teamwork – playing your position well and relying on your teammates. There is no such thing as a one man team in baseball. Understanding your need for others and relying on everyone to do their part is a given.

Respect and Fairness. Baseball is a game of rules and order. Following the rules and respecting the game is critical. Umpires who enforce the rules may be imperfect, but becoming distracted by a bad call is a certain track to failure. Circumstances in life may not be fair much of the time, but those who are successful find a way to move forward anyway.

The value of practice and repetition. Players who hate practice rarely develop the skills to effectively compete at a high level. The old adage, "practice makes perfect" is true. Throwing strikes, fielding a ground ball or hitting a curve ball only becomes routine if it is done repeatedly. The same is true of sales calls, performing a medical procedure, preparing a meal, or any other life skill.

Having fun. The best players find joy in being on the field of play.

Overcoming fear. Fear can take many forms in baseball. The first thing that has to be overcome is the fear of the ball. Anyone learning to catch or hit a baseball as a youngster has had the experience of being hit by a hard object. Overcoming that fear is critical to becoming proficient at the game. There is also the fear making a mistake that will cost your team the game. Courage is required to overcome fear to find joy in the game and in life.

So what can baseball really teach kids? Apparently quite a lot. Looking back on it, all the time I thought I was just playing baseball I was really gaining skills that made me a better person and a more capable leader. The following is a piece I wrote a few years ago about learning a lesson from playing catch with my Dad in the back yard.

Courage

Fear beside a picket fence,
A backstop in our yard.
A father pitching to a son,
Hurling balls so hard
That every week the broken slats
Would have to be replaced,
From errant throws and cowardice
Behind a makeshift plate.

Don't turn your head, son. Watch the ball.
Face it square and true.
Fear becomes the enemy that's
Conquered by the few.

Day by day the fear recedes,
The boy becomes a man.
No longer kneeling with a glove,
Brown with summer's tan.
Fastballs thrown by other arms,
Delivered with great speed;
Circumstances, challenges,
In thought and word and deed.

Still it rings within my ears
When pitches seem too hard.
Lessons learned with baseball gloves
And Dad in our back yard.

-Steve Proctor

Reflections on Leadership

PRESBYTERIAN SENIOR LIVING

Vulnerable Leaders

September 2016

One of the recurring themes of Patrick Lencioni's leadership books is what he calls "vulnerability based trust". His writings are presented in a story format which he calls fables – but seem more like narrative case studies with the names changed to protect the innocent. In *The 5 Dysfunctions of a Team* he identifies the primary reason for the absence of trust on a team as the unwillingness of team members to be open with one another about their mistakes and weaknesses. He contends that it is impossible to build trust without vulnerability.

In another one of his books, Lencioni expands the virtue of being vulnerable to those outside of your immediate team members as the way to build trust in the people you hope to engage as customers. This is a bit more risky, as the people outside of your team may be more inclined to take advantage of you and may not always have your best interests at heart. The title of the book *(Getting Naked)* was chosen to identify

how uncomfortable being vulnerable can be in this environment. The title was well chosen. I have to admit that I was a bit uncomfortable even placing an order for a book with this title.

His latest book, *The Ideal Team Player*, focuses in part on how to identify current and future team members who willingly embrace vulnerability based trust through personal and organizational humility. He combines this virtue with two others - being hungry and smart, and provides techniques for finding people who possess these virtues.

So what is this thing we call vulnerability? Isn't vulnerability about weakness? Is weakness a virtue we look for in an effective leader? Is being vulnerable really a good idea in a world full of people who are seeking to exploit any perceived weakness for their own advantage? Is Lencioni right about vulnerability being an essential element in building trust, or is this an idea that sounds good in theory but has little practical application?

There are a number of definitions of vulnerability, but there are three definitions that resonate with me – (1) capable of or susceptible to being wounded or hurt; (2) open to moral attack, criticism, temptation; or (3) open to assault and difficult to defend. None of these definitions

sound positive or uplifting and make vulnerability seem like something that should be avoided at all costs.

The concept of vulnerability has a long history. One of the oldest and most vivid examples is taken from Homer's Iliad, which was written in the 8th century BC. Achilles was a Greek hero of the Trojan War and the central character and greatest warrior of Homer's Iliad. According to the story, when Achilles was born his mother wanted to make him immortal and thus, dipped him in the river Styx. However, she did not realize that his heel, by which she held him, was not touched by the waters, and so that was the only part of his body that remained mortal. Later in the story a poisoned arrow struck Achilles' heel, the only vulnerable

part of his body, and he subsequently died. Over 2000 years later, every medical person or sports enthusiast can identify the location of the Achilles tendon, which is susceptible to injury among professional athletes. Today the expression "Achilles heel" is used to describe the heroic figure with a potentially fatal weakness.

Almost every superhero since that time has had some sort of vulnerability. Superman (the superhero of my youth) was powerless in the presence of kryptonite. If the stories of heroes being vulnerable are about risk of death and destruction, why would a person who aspires to leadership seek to become vulnerable?


I think there are several reasons that vulnerability is a key element of leadership behavior, both from a theoretical and practical standpoint:

- It is important to admit what we all know to be true - that every human being is vulnerable at some level. People of faith know that while we are all imperfect and inclined to do wrong, we are loved by God who offers each one grace and forgiveness.

- Those who are not insightful enough to recognize their own imperfections are not intelligent or wise enough to be effective leaders. Those who can recognize their imperfections but cannot acknowledge their shortcomings to others are not perceived to be honest enough to be trusted with the mantle of leadership.

- It takes an emotionally secure person to be vulnerable enough to admit to being wrong and still remain confident enough to effectively lead others. From this perspective vulnerability and weakness is not the same thing.

- Confident leaders who admit to being imperfect and vulnerable are inherently trusted and admired.

- A shared sense of vulnerability narrows the distance between people, creating a bond that fosters teamwork.

- The lens of vulnerability is an essential perspective in building a balanced and high performing team. Leaders who recognize and publicly acknowledge their own shortcomings more frequently surround themselves with team members who have complimentary skills. Conversely, leaders who are blind to their own vulnerability are more likely to surround themselves with people who share the same strengths and weaknesses.

- The connection between acknowledged vulnerability and humility is absolute. From a team building perspective, humility breeds respect.

- The connection between perceived invulnerability and arrogance is equally strong. For a variety of reasons, arrogance is the Achilles heel of leadership.

- Vulnerability is the prerequisite to humility and other behaviors that are essential to establish a level of trust that every organization needs to succeed.

The paradox of vulnerability and weakness was addressed by Brené Brown, the noted researcher and social scientist. When asked the question, *"Do you think society supports people who are viewed as more vulnerable? Can we come off as weak if we show imperfections?"* She responded, *"The difficult thing is that vulnerability is the first thing I look for in you and the last thing I'm willing to show you. In you, it's courage and daring. In me, it's weakness."* Brown acknowledges that embracing vulnerability is not easy. She talks candidly about her difficult journey toward vulnerability in her widely viewed 2010 TED Talk titled *"The Power of Vulnerability - The Human Connection – the Ability to Empathize, Belong, and Love."*
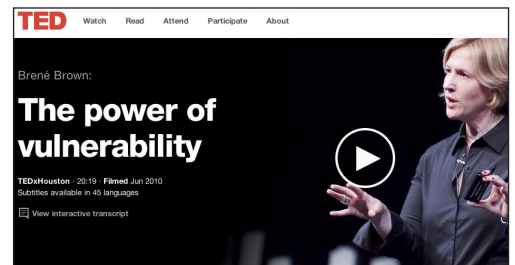
The truth is that the same vulnerability we identify as strength in someone we admire can become our strength as a leader when we have the courage to be open with one another about our mistakes and weaknesses. Lencioni is right - being vulnerable builds trust on a team – not because it is a sign of weakness, but because it is a sign of authenticity and strength.

Reflections on Leadership

PRESBYTERIAN SENIOR LIVING

Acceptance and Belonging

October 2016

October is the time when students are just getting settled into the rhythm of a new school year. While my six grandchildren range in age from elementary school to entering the first year of college, they all have one thing in common. As they adjust to their new surroundings and classes, they are all hoping to make new friends and experience a sense of belonging. In many respects their success in school is dependent on how successful they are in establishing new relationships and rekindling old friendships.

Recently I read the book, **Daring Greatly,** by Brene Brown which shed an entirely new light on the meaning of the word "belonging". In her research she describes a conversation she had with a group of 8th graders about the difference between belonging and fitting in. With remarkable insight these children shared these thoughts:

- *Belonging is being somewhere you want to be, and they want you. Fitting in is being somewhere you really want to be, but they don't care one way or the other.*

- *Belonging is being accepted for you. Fitting in is being accepted for being like everyone else.*

- *I get to be me if I belong. I have to be like you to fit in.*

Many adults I know would struggle for the words to express what it means to belong in their neighborhood, church, family, or workplace. As I reread their observations, a phrase came immediately to mind - *"Out of the mouth of babes..."* - a biblical reference that has been shortened to mean something that a small child says that surprises you because it shows an adult's wisdom and understanding of a situation. The truth is that no matter what your age, we all hope to fit in, but our heartfelt desire is to belong.

Belonging takes many shapes, but we all recognize what belonging looks like when we see it. Recently I was in Boston and passed the location that was the setting for the long running television program *"Cheers"*. This neighborhood bar was a place where (according to the theme song) "everybody knows your name". While the characters were all a bit odd, and often were less than complimentary toward each other, there was an underlying sense of acceptance. To reinforce this message, at the beginning of the program one of the main characters would enter to a chorus of patrons shouting "Norm!"

In an organizational context, this is what PSL's mission statement means when we refer to a "sense of belonging". You are somewhere you want to be, and they want you; You are accepted for who you are; and you get to be yourself.

In recent years PSL has embarked upon a concerted effort to create a more accepting environment. Inclusion and diversity have been added to our lexicon as we have focused on this area. This focus is entirely consistent with our historical roots as a faith based

organization. At a recent PSL board retreat our faith based roots were described as being "guided by the life and teachings of Jesus". Jesus routinely reached out to those who were not generally accepted by society – often referred to collectively as tax collectors and sinners. By spending his time with outcasts, he set a high standard for those who follow his example.

While society may value tolerance – *"A fair, objective, and permissive attitude toward opinions, beliefs, and practices that differ from one's own"*; or implore us to coexist – *"To exist separately or independently but peaceably, often while remaining rivals or adversaries"*, both of these behaviors fall well short of true acceptance and belonging.

I like the words of the apostle Paul as he describes what it means to experience belonging in the first chapter of his letter to the Ephesians (KJV) – *"To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he has made us accepted in the beloved."* There are three important ideas that are expressed here. First, we are all recipients of undeserved grace. Second, we are accepted -not just tolerated or allowed to coexist. Finally, we become a part of a group that is referred to as "the beloved" – a place where behavior toward each other is described using a derivative of the word Love. This is what we aspire to when we talk about embracing inclusion and diversity.

A great example of how acceptance and belonging play out in a health care setting is found in the book, **God's Hotel**, by Dr. Victoria Sweet. The book is a collection of stories about physicians, nurses and other staff of San

Francisco's Laguna Honda Hospital. Because it was a place of treatment for the most downtrodden and chronically ill persons, many of whom were suffering from a life of making bad choices, the message of acceptance and love is especially inspiring.

One of my favorite examples was Terry, a woman with more physical and social problems that one person should have in a lifetime. Confined to a wheelchair, addicted to drugs, and in a relationship with a boyfriend who was physically and emotionally abusive, her two and a half year journey was accurately described as long, ironic, and miraculous. Her change in temperament went from irritable and angry to pleasant, grateful, and even happy, was the result of more than excellent medical care. The sense of community and accepting and supportive relationships provided the basis for the spiritual and emotional healing that was essential to her recovery.

One of the powerful messages of **God's Hotel** is that acceptance does not mean

that we have to approve of, or endorse, every aspect of someone's behavior or embrace every annoying habit. When we live and work together in close proximity day after day, there will be things that we object to or subjects on which we disagree. Such a realization does not diminish the underlying sense of love and respect that is essential to the sense of belonging that we all seek.

Establishing a climate of acceptance and belonging is harder than it sounds. Even those who aspire to be open and accepting of others subconsciously maintain a personal list of those to whom acceptance and belonging should be extended while keeping a separate list of those unworthy of such grace. Understanding this truth about ourselves is the first step in a leader's journey to support and encourage an atmosphere of acceptance and belonging for people who may look or act very differently from each other, or who may have dissimilar beliefs.

Belonging and acceptance are not just the lofty aspirations of enlightened leadership. They are the precursor to the trust, commitment and teamwork behind every successful endeavor.

Reflections on Leadership

Faith and Integrity

November 2016

This past month PSL lost one of its champions, former board chair, Ned Gardner. Attending his memorial service was an inspiring experience. Many spoke of his faith, and how he treasured his family and friends, and recalled how his life clearly illustrated his priorities. These are themes that I have heard before in memorial services for others. But there was another theme that was also frequently mentioned. It was that he lived his life with integrity.

This reference reminded me of a conversation I had with Ned nearly 20 years ago. I cannot remember where we were, but there was a speaker on the topic of business ethics. At a break in the program Ned made an observation that remains with me to this day. He said, "I don't mean to be picky, but the very term "business ethics" makes it seem like there is a different kind of ethics for different situations. Whether it is in business, government, or in your personal life, you are either an ethical person or you are not. An ethical person acts with integrity no matter where they are or what they do."

I have pondered these words on many occasions over the years, especially when I am confronted with evidence of a lack of integrity in the public or private sector. Such musings invite a number of questions. How does an individual get to the point of ethical failure? Did they always have a low standard? Was this a single ethical lapse in an otherwise virtuous life? Were there poor examples from childhood that led them astray? Did they start out as an idealistic young person only to succumb to cynicism later in life?

While the answers to these questions are often unknowable to mere mortals, there are some thoughts that help me to make sense of the world. The first is that the foundation for an ethical life must be based on more than social pressure or the opinions of others. My favorite definition of integrity is *doing the right thing, even when no one is watching*. Ethics that are based on what is socially acceptable and what people will think of us will not guide our conduct in moments when we believe that no one will ever know that what we are doing is wrong.

The second insight is taken from Lewis' book, **Screwtape Letters**, where he provides an understanding into the most common departure from a life of virtue – *"Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one–the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts…"* In my experience it is rare for someone to wake up one morning and announce that they have decided to live entirely for themselves and take the low road. The path that leads away from a life of integrity is most often a slow and imperceptible descent.

It should not be a surprise that what is true about individual behavior is also true about collections of individuals that formally or informally adopt and live by their own code of ethics. Organizations can also lose its ethical underpinnings. One of the most high profile organizational examples occurred just over a year ago when it was discovered that Volkswagen manipulated its emission control software on 11 million diesel powered vehicles over a 7 year period to create false readings during emission testing. This engineering change enabled Volkswagen vehicles to deliver high fuel

economy and exceptional performance when the car was being driven under normal conditions (with 40 times the nitrous oxide emissions than legally permitted), but fully comply with emissions testing when the software installed in the vehicle detected that an emissions test was underway. This intentional act could only have happened with the cooperation of many highly skilled employees over a period of years. When it was discovered, VW lost 1/3 of its market value and was fined billions of dollars. Permanent damage to the brand of the world's largest automaker is difficult to calculate.

Volkswagen is not alone. Examples can be found every week in the Wall Street Journal. This past month the financial giant Wells Fargo was discovered to have opened fake accounts under customer names using confidential customer information, collecting millions of dollars in fees. The results of this massive scandal are unfolding at this time, but it appears that hundreds of employees were involved in overcharging thousands of customers in a pervasive and systematic way.

The slide from organizational integrity can be both more fundamental and

less dramatic than the situations that make headlines. Peter Greer is the CEO of Hope International, a Christian organization that makes thousands of micro finance loans in 3rd world countries to provide a path out of poverty for some of the world's poorest people. His book **Mission Drift** focuses on not-for-profit organizations that have gradually moved away from their original purpose to become something that the organizations founders would no longer recognize – sometimes becoming the antithesis of what the founders intended. His examples include colleges, foundations, and other types of not-for-profit organizations. From an organizational perspective, loss of purpose can be just as devastating as the catastrophic ethical lapse.

This is reinforced by the words of Jesus in Luke chapter 14, and Matthew chapter 5. *"Salt is good for seasoning. But if it loses its flavor, how do you make it salty again? Flavorless salt is neither good for the soil nor for the manure pile. It is thrown away… Thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless"* (NLT). Peter Greer would argue that organizations that suffer from mission drift have lost their distinctive flavor.

What is the answer to the problem of maintaining personal and organizational integrity in this day and

age? I believe that having a fixed moral compass to act as a guide is essential to avoid both a catastrophic lapse in judgement and the slow, downward drift into irrelevance. In a faith based organization like Presbyterian Senior Living we acknowledge that the life and teachings of Jesus is our moral compass.

Does that mean that everyone is able to live up to these lofty standards in every instance? Of course not. As human beings we know that we are all prone to failure. We may also disagree on how to interpret the call of faith in any particular circumstance. Having a standard and falling short does have the effect of making our failings painfully obvious. But fear of failure should not cause us to lower standards or eliminate standards altogether. Having a well-defined moral compass means that we have a clear understanding of what we should aim for and enables us to regain our bearings when we fall short.

The life of Ned Gardner and others like him illustrate the powerful connection between faith and integrity. This is an important lesson for all of us. Well done, good and faithful servant.

Reflections on Leadership

PRESBYTERIAN
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Worry

December 2016

The period of time leading up to and following the recent elections can best be described as a time of great anxiety. Many voters, worried about their declining standard of living and loss of job opportunities, voted for a change in direction. In the weeks following the election, others have been worried that the changes that may be coming will leave them worse off than before, and are anxious about the future.

Worry is not just a general state of mind. It most often has a decidedly personal dimension – the health and well-being of those we love usually tops the list. Worry can be rooted in the reality of present circumstances, or a feeling of impending doom - that there is something that we do not yet know about that may occur to upset our otherwise tranquil existence.

When I began as a nurse with Presbyterian Senior Living 45 years ago, one of my favorite residents was known to be a constant worrier. At nearly 90 years old, she was blessed with a loving and attentive family, which included three Presbyterian pastors. They all lived at a distance, but arranged to speak with her at previously arranged times every week.

In spite of a complete lack of evidence to the contrary, her mind was filled with worry about her family's health. One afternoon during a telephone

call with her son in North Carolina she was cut off unexpectedly. In the 5 minutes that it took to reconnect, she became convinced that her son had experienced a heart attack and had died. It was only after getting him back on the phone and hearing the sound of his voice that she was able to calm down and acknowledge that her worry was unfounded. Later I spoke to her about her constant worrying and jumping to conclusions. She responded, "I know that I should not worry so much. Actually, I pray about this often, because I am worried that my worrying is a sin." I was speechless. She actually found a way to worry about her tendency to worry.

The truth is that worry is a part of everyone's life at one time or another. Over the years I have learned a few

things about the cause and effects of worry:

Most of what we worry about does not happen, and the time spent on worry can rob us of the joy of the moment. It seems that the daily news is filled with stories of bad things happening to people who are going about their business when tragedy unexpectedly intervenes. The cumulative effect of this message can be chilling. In his book, **The Last Child in the Woods, Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder**, author Richard Louv talks about the "Bogeyman Syndrome" – the fear of traffic, of crime, of stranger danger, and of nature itself. While there is scant hard evidence of increased risk, this worry has led to a reduction in boundaries where a typical 9 year old child is allowed to roam to 1/9 of the space that children were given freedom to play only 20 years earlier. Louv would argue that worry is keeping our children and grandchildren from experiencing independence and the wonder of nature, and that lack of experience will cripple them in the future.

Worry is often based on having a short term perspective. In his book **Sabbath, Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives,** Wayne Muller tells the following story:

Worry

"There is an old Taoist story about a wise man on the northern frontier of China. One day, for no apparent reason, a young man's horse ran away and was taken by nomads across the border. Everyone tried to offer consolation for the man's ill fortune, but his father, a wise man, said, 'What makes you so sure that this is not a blessing?'

Months later, his horse returned, bringing with her a magnificent stallion. This time everyone was full of congratulations for the son's good fortune. But now his father said, 'What makes you sure this isn't a disaster?' Their household was made richer by this fine horse, which the son loved to ride. But one day he fell off the horse and broke his hip. Once again, everyone offered their consolation for his bad luck, but his father said, 'What makes you so sure that this is not a blessing?'

A year later the nomads mounted an invasion across the border, and every able bodied man was required to take up his bow and go into battle. The Chinese frontiersmen lost nine out of every ten men. Only because the son was lame did the father and son survive to take care of each other. Truly the story reminds us, blessing turns to disaster, and disaster to blessing: The changes have no end, nor can the mystery be fathomed."
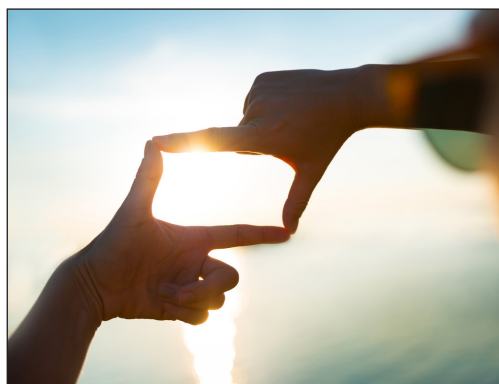
The lesson here is that we never fully know if something that is troubling us at the moment is a bad thing or an opportunity for growth or blessing. Only time will reveal the truth. Worry

will only make us miserable until we find out one way or the other.

Worry is not always bad, especially if it inspires a positive change in direction. Those who never worry may become so content that there is no inspiration for change that requires leaving their present comfort zone. The key is to channel the concern into identifying what in the situation can be changed, identifying a goal, and creating a plan of action.

Leaders who are preoccupied with worry often avoid taking the risks required to achieve success. Aside from making a leader a slow decision maker, constantly expressing worry can inhibit the process of building a team of high achievers. It is my experience that people rarely flock to leaders who are racked with worry about the future. Conversely, an underlying sense of calm (not arrogance) is a very attractive leadership trait.

Finally, some circumstances cannot be changed and require acceptance rather than worry. Jesus addressed the tendency to be anxious by asking a simple question – recorded in **Matthew chapter 6.** "*And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?*" I especially like the King James version of this particular verse - "*Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?*" Do you think you can

live longer (or become taller) if you worry about it?

I believe that the only way to escape the paralyzing effects of worry is to accept that a large portion of life and the future is unknowable. This lack of knowledge is not something to be feared. Knowing every turn in the road of life would rob us of the sense of wonder and surprise that makes life interesting.

One of the best ways to combat worry is to be able to share the burden of worry with someone you trust. Getting an outside perspective can help to identify events that are unlikely to occur, provide a longer view and balanced outlook on what is going on around us, help to form a positive plan of action when necessary, or simply find comfort in a sympathetic ear. We all need that kind of help from time to time, and we can all provide that help to someone else in a time of need. Reaching out in this way is not a new idea. The words of the Apostle Paul in **chapter 6 of the book of Galatians** still speak to us today. *"Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ."*

Blessings,