

Reflections on Leadership



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CARE SERVICES

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It's Not Fair!

I have a 3 year old grandson who seems to mimic everything I say. At a recent family dinner we were discussing the challenge of being parents, and concluded that the most frequently uttered phrase children use when addressing their parents is "It's not fair!" Upon hearing this conversation, my grandson immediately shouted "Daddy, it's not fair!", and has been repeating it ever since. I consider this to be a humorous payback for enduring the teenage years of my now adult son. However, if we are honest, we must admit that this expression is a common reaction of all people whenever we feel an injustice has been done.

As leaders, we must do our best to make sure that we treat others fairly. The concept of fairness is the foundation of all PHI human resource policies, and should be infused in all of our daily activities as we relate to others. When unfairness is tolerated by an organization's leadership the result is lower employee morale, resentment that leads to higher staff turnover, reduced productivity and job satisfaction, and decreased cooperation among employees that negatively affects the quality of care delivered to our residents.

The issue of unfairness is not just related to how we treat others. It is relatively common for leaders to be unfairly criticized for making decisions that are in the best interests of the organization as a whole. Given the restrictions placed on employers for disclosing resident or employee related confidential information, it may be difficult or impossible to defend ourselves, even if we know we are right. In these times we may be tempted to shout "It's not fair!"

How we react when confronted with unfairness can illustrate our maturity and wisdom as leaders and provide an opportunity for personal growth.

As many of you know, following graduation from nursing school, my wife Rhonda and I had come to the attention of the CEO of PHI when we had unsuccessfully applied to be medical missionaries. When I was hired and assigned to work as a staff nurse in a small PHI nursing facility, my first supervisor (who was not involved in hiring me) was convinced that I was too young to be placed in a position of responsibility. She may have been right, but she was not in a position to discharge me so long as my work remained satisfactory. Hoping to put pressure on me to resign, she decided to tell everyone who would listen that I was not smart enough to work for PHI and that she resented being saddled with such an idiot for an employee.

Knowing that I had done nothing to deserve this treatment, I wondered what I should do in the face of such a patently unfair situation. There were several options. I could lash back at her verbally, report her behavior to someone higher up in the organization, or passively undermine her authority as my supervisor. Ultimately I decided to not react to her unfair criticism, but to work hard and hope that everyone would realize that I had the ability to make an important contribution to PHI's ministry. I now recognize this as one of many turning points in my career with PHI. In time, my fellow employees became so supportive of me that my supervisor had no audience for her criticisms, and her critical comments stopped altogether. Within two years she retired and I was given her position and responsibilities. I am convinced that my

behavior toward her fostered a sense of respect among my staff that served as the foundation for the next several years of work as their new leader.

But the story does not end there. About 15 years later, my former supervisor was suffering from dementia and needed care in a PHI facility. The family contacted me (as PHI's Chief Operating Officer) to see if I could help with placement. When I visited her following her admission to the dementia unit, I discovered that all of the unpleasant criticisms had faded from her consciousness, and she could only recall good things about the time we worked together. Before me sat a kind and sweet woman, barely clinging to her dignity, who desperately needed care. Any lingering reservations I may have had about how I had reacted to her unfairness as a supervisor vanished.

The point of the story is that as leaders we create the climate around us by the way we act when things are not going well. Our response to unjust criticism is one of many opportunities to display a sense of maturity and respect that will be noticed by our co-workers. Whenever we are tempted to shout "It's not fair", we need to reflect on the words of the apostle Peter that I believe describes the behavior that all leaders should exhibit:

Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil for evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. (1 Peter 3:8-9).

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Making Mistakes

No one is perfect, and any attempt to try to convince your co-workers that you are the exception to that rule will be futile. Everyone makes mistakes, has less than admirable motives, and falls short of perfection. This truth is both biblical and practical. This reality calls forward two questions that relate to leadership:

- How do we handle our own mistakes?
- How will we handle the mistakes of those we lead?

Every leader that I know and respect can quickly recount mistakes they have made during their career. This is not to say that these errors dominate their thoughts or paralyze them as decision makers. Mistakes are facts of life that are important to remember. The question is how we react when we make an error in judgment. First of all, we need to recognize that the best course is to admit that we are in error and that with the benefit of hindsight, we would do things differently if we had a chance to do everything over. We also need to learn from the situation, so we will not repeat the same mistake again. Jim Emerson, my good friend from Presbyterian Homes in Florida has a motto on his desk that simply says "Only new mistakes." Failure to learn from your mistakes can be a fatal flaw. Trying to maintain an appearance of perfection when our co-workers know better, is almost as fatal as not learning from your mistakes. Admitting you are wrong and promising to do better in the future takes a confident and mature person – the kind of person that we all should strive to become.

Just as important is how we react to the mistakes of those we lead. This can be a difficult dilemma. In health care an error can cause irreparable harm to someone – even death. Poor treatment of residents cannot be tolerated under any circumstances. Errors in handling public funds or improper disclosure of health or employee information can result in severe legal penalties. Add to these factors the reality that no one really likes to hear bad news, and you can see how we can easily create a climate where leaders are intolerant of mistakes of any kind. I have a story that I believe illustrates what happens when an intolerant environment makes people afraid to call attention to their mistakes.

Some years ago, my brother-in-law got a new van. My other sister was visiting with her children, and they decided to take the whole group of kids to McDonalds. Because the van was only about a week old, the kids were given a stern warning not to spill anything. In a booming voice my brother-in-law exclaimed, "If I find that you kids are careless and spill something in this new van, there will be trouble. Do you understand?" All of the kids solemnly nodded in the affirmative, and piled into the car. Everything seemed to go well, and my sister and her children returned to their home in Indiana. About 5 days later, it was discovered that someone (probably on the trip to McDonalds) had spilled an entire orange drink on the carpet behind the back seat. By this time the stain had soaked in and hardened, and it was impossible to get out. Had the mistake been immediately discovered, it would have been relatively easy to clean. As it was, for the next 5 years, this orange stain was a reminder that when the fear of making a mistake is so great

that covering it up is less painful than owning up to it, permanent damage can result.

Keeping this example in mind, we should ask ourselves several questions:

- As leaders, how do we personally react to bad news?
- Are the people we lead afraid to tell us the truth?
- When someone around us makes a mistake or error in judgment, do we let our focus drift from their behavior to a personal attack on them?
- Do I use mistakes as an opportunity to make an example of someone, or as an opportunity to learn or teach an important lesson?

Since our goal is to create a climate where truth is honored and respected and the future is more important than the past, all PHI leaders need to encourage people to come to us when they make a mistake, react calmly to bad news when we hear it, focus on the behavior rather than the individual, and maximize the opportunity to use the experience to learn how to do better in the future. This is the formula for any organization that aspires to learn from their collective mistakes.

Finally, we need to recognize that perfection is an unattainable goal, for ourselves and those around us. The Bible tells us that in all of human history, only Jesus was able to live a perfect life. The rest of are in need of his forgiveness and live each day by the grace of God.

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The Importance of Front Line Leadership

One of the great strengths of PHI is the quality of our front line leadership. This opinion is based on my 35 years of experience in PHI as a nurse, Director of Nursing, Executive Director, Chief Operating Officer, and CEO. I know what it takes to successfully provide leadership on the 3-11 or 11-7 shift, on a holiday or weekend when a full compliment of staff is not present, in the steamy pressure of the kitchen, or the recesses of the laundry room.

For many years when addressing groups of leaders in the PHI family, I have often remarked that front line supervisors have a greater impact on PHI's culture of caring than those of us with positions that may appear to be higher on the organizational chart. Recently, other organizations are coming to the same conclusion.

In the popular management book, "First Break all the Rules", the authors state that "Managers trump companies". What they mean is that people may come to work for a company based on the organization's reputation, but whether they stay on the job or become disillusioned and leave to work for someone else is dependent on the quality of the leadership demonstrated by their immediate supervisor. In "The Southwest Airlines Way", a recent book on the most successful airline in the history of US aviation, the authors contend that an important ingredient of this success is the Southwest Airlines

culture, which is shaped by front line leadership. While their CEO is given credit for providing inspiration for this culture, the day to day execution of the principles that guide the company rests firmly in the hands of the front line leadership team. It is the key element to their success in a highly competitive industry that has been buffeted by constant change and pressure.

Why do I believe that front line supervision is critically important? First of all, this makes sense to me as a principle of physics or body mechanics. The farther you are away from any object, the harder it is to move. Whether it is using a fulcrum and lever or lifting another person from bed to chair, it is easier to move something when you are close to it. I learned this principle while in Jr. High School when I had a former Marine drill instructor for physical education. One of his favorite forms of punishment for fooling around in class (which I was inclined to do) was to make a person hold their arms straight out in front of them with palms parallel to the ground. After a few minutes, the arms that were light when held close to the body seemed to gain tremendous weight and became hard to hold up. Later, the lessons in body mechanics as an orderly and nursing school student reinforced this principle. I can still hear my instructor in my orientation as an

orderly at the Sisters of Mercy Hospital – "Stay close to the patient and lift with your legs!"

The same principle is true when applied to leadership. Those leaders closest to the people we serve understand the nature of the work, can be a more consistent source of support and encouragement, and provide crucial feedback that will enable us to adjust our approach in the face of changing conditions. As far as the front line employee is concerned, their supervisor is the face of leadership in the organization. The values that are demonstrated by their immediate supervisor become the values of the organization. This is a powerful but little appreciated truth.

The reason I make the time to try to communicate the leadership principles that are at the heart of PHI's culture is that I am acutely aware of how important you are to achieving our mission of care and compassion. Unless you demonstrate the values that make PHI different and special, the ministry of PHI will sink into mediocrity. You are the true leadership heroes that make PHI what it is today. Keep up the good work. You are more important than you realize.

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Standards

Looking at today's world, one would think that life is about winning. There are even bumper stickers that proclaim "The one who dies with the most toys wins". Television programs like "Survivor" are constructed on the premise of competition-survival of the fittest. Competition is at the heart of the free enterprise system which has provided us with the best goods and services for the lowest possible price.

Those who know me well understand that I am not opposed to the idea of competition. In fact, I have been known to be hyper-competitive on occasion. Whether it is volleyball, basketball, or making sure that PHI's programs and services can match or better the competition in every community we serve, I have a keenly competitive instinct. One of the basic principles of PHI's leadership culture, "The relentless pursuit of excellence", has competitive overtones. But in the pursuit of excellence, competition is not enough.

In his book "Beyond Basketball", Mike Krzyzewski cites a quote from Jean Giraudoux, "only the mediocre are always at their best". While this might sound a bit strange, he goes on to explain that excellence is not necessarily about competition, or winning or losing, it is about standards. "If your standards are low, it is easy to meet those standards every single day, every single year.

But if your standard is to be the best, there will be days that you fall short of that goal. It is OK not to win every game. The only problem would be if you allow a loss or failure to change your standards. Keep your standards intact, keep the bar set high, continue to try your very best every day to meet those standards. If you do that, you can always be proud of the work you do."

Working for PHI for the past 35 years, I have witnessed the constant drumbeat of improvement. The combination of new techniques, technology, medical advances, and higher expectations of our residents and their families means that what was state of the art a few years ago is considered woefully inadequate now. This can be said about every department within PHI.

For those of us in the PHI family, it is always about setting and reaching for high standards. Perfection may not be achievable every day, but the pursuit of excellence is the goal. Here are a number of keys to doing your part as a leader in striving for excellence to achieve PHI's mission:

- Set high standards for yourself - to be a credible voice to your fellow employees, you must manage yourself first.
- Do not be satisfied with occasional excellence. Take pride in doing your best every day.

- When you do not live up to the highest standard you have set for yourself, resist the temptation to lower your sights and shoot for something less than your best.
- Talk the talk. Encourage everyone you work with to put forth their best effort.
- When your team falls short, do not ignore it. Looking the other way will communicate that you tolerate a lower standard.
- When confronting a performance problem, do not place blame, or resort to a personal attack. Squarely face the shortcoming and its causes and engage your team in devising a plan to improve. Look for ways to support the improvement process to create a consistency in performance over time.
- When you consistently reach the high standard you have set for yourself and your team, take a hard look at the standard to see if you should recalibrate and consider a new standard. Remember excellence is not a goal to be reached, but a continuous journey.

As PHI leaders, the rest of the PHI family expects us to set the pace. Setting a high standard is the first step in achieving excellence.

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Painful Lessons

While almost anyone will share their most recent success or tell a story about how some brilliant idea worked in their favor, few people will tell you about a time when they failed or were responsible for something that did not work out well. The truth about most successful leaders is that learning comes in many forms – and sometimes it can be painful. Those who can honestly admit to making errors in judgment and can learn from failure are way ahead of everyone else.

Some of the most successful figures in history were abject failures before they experienced success. Abraham Lincoln, widely recognized as the gold standard for presidential leadership was elected president on the heels of a string of unsuccessful political experiences. Every political loss at the local, state, and national level became a building block for the political genius that led the United States through the most troubled period in our history. Thomas Edison, arguably the most creative inventor of his (or maybe any) generation suffered through innumerable failed experiments before breakthroughs that led to over 1000 U.S. patents that changed the face of American society. The most famous of these stories involves thousands of failed attempts to create the electric light bulb. Even central Pennsylvania's icon Milton Hershey failed in several business ventures before launching the world famous chocolate company that bears his name. We are inspired when we hear these stories, but are not so impressed that we want our names to be associated with unsuccessful ventures.

In the mid 1970's when Ware Presbyterian Village was just starting, I was approached by the county office on aging about starting a senior adult day program. As a new administrator of that campus, I was in the enviable position of having a long waiting list with many families seeking

admission. This seemed like a perfect opportunity. For the first year, the program would be offered at no cost to the participants. If the program was well received, it could be continued at a lower level of support, and would ultimately become self sufficient. We had the perfect space for the program and a list of the names of the likely people to use the service. How could this program miss?

We hired capable staff, and set off on our way. A year later the program closed from lack of interest, with a clear message that people did not value this service highly enough to pay for it. What happened? I was disappointed to realize that this great service could not be given away for free and was forced to recognize several things that led to the program's failure:

Timing - the rural southern Chester county market was not ready for this idea. We did not do a market study, because we thought the idea was so wonderful that it could not miss.

Marketing – We did not explain the value of the program from the participant's point of view. We also did not fully recognize that we were selling to families who had to get an older person up in time to be transported to the adult day care site.

Implementation - the vision of what we were trying to do did not correspond with the execution of the idea and was not well integrated with the other programs and services that we were offering at the time. (Albert Einstein observed that vision without execution is hallucination).

These lessons took a while to sink in, but became the basis for looking at other opportunities in the following years, and helped to improve the odds of success in other new ventures.

This is only one of many painful experiences that have helped to shape me

as a person and a leader. Other situations relative to employee selection, implementing change, property acquisition, and many others are equally vivid as I look back of 35 years of history with PHI.

A few final observations about learning from failure:

- Learning can only happen when you take responsibility for the conditions that led to the poor outcome and change your behavior. Don't look to others for failure. Look to your role in the situation and focus on what you could have done differently.
- Don't let failure make you so afraid to act that you become an anchor around the ankle of the rest of your team members. The only way to be overcome by failure is to give up or lower your sights.
- Take reasonable risks - it is always good to avoid "below the waterline" mistakes (failures that will sink the ship).
- You can use your painful learning experiences as powerful object lessons when you are willing to share them with your co-workers. People rarely respect leaders who have never experienced failure at any level.
- If you have never failed at anything, you have not stretched yourself far enough.

Most leaders will tell you that their most significant achievements have come from the ashes of failure. It is not a crime to fail – if you make good use of the lessons learned from the experience.

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The Need for Change

We live in an age when change is constantly thrust upon us. Things always seem to happen too fast, and we often cannot recover and experience a sense of normalcy before we are forced to change again. Some of this is related to technology – cell phones, computers, etc. But even beyond the obvious changes in technology, nothing seems to stay the same in any area of life.

The problem is that when we occupy a leadership position, we are called to be a change agent and lead a change process. New laws and regulations, new forms and payment mechanisms, the increased expectations of employees, the people we serve, and the general public all push us to change and improve. In the face of all of this, there is a desire to resist. We have all heard “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” – which is the natural and predictable reaction to change. The problem with waiting until something is broken is that whatever “it” is will most certainly break down at the worst possible time, often with catastrophic results. We certainly do not want the computer program that runs our payroll to break down at the wrong time and make it impossible to pay people when they expect to be paid. On a personal level, we do not want to experience a heart attack before deciding to make life style changes to live a long and happy life.

It is said that for individuals and organizations change only happens as a result of two things - desperation or inspiration. With desperation, circumstances require change because the old way of doing things will no longer work. With inspiration, there is an enlightened view of the future that is always reaching for something better. Unfortunately most people and organizations live in the deadly space between inspiration and desperation. This is what Jim Collins means in his book, *Good to Great*, when he calls Good the enemy of the Great.

For both individuals or organizations these two reasons for change have remained true

throughout history. The Apostle Paul’s dramatic life change occurred on the Damascus Road in Chapter 9 of the Book of Acts. His arrogance as a self righteous persecutor of the church vanished when he was blinded by a heavenly light and heard the voice of Jesus. It is hard to imagine a more potent combination of desperation and inspiration. Most of us have less dramatic or visual crises in our life, but life’s tragedies or challenges are often a time for reflection and redirection of lifelong patterns.

With organizations it is often a financial crisis or a similar threat to the very existence of the organization that is the impetus for change. In the late 1960’s, Al Schartner, PHI’s former CEO recognized that PHI could no longer survive by focusing primarily on small personal care facilities. Recognizing that PHI’s financial condition was very precarious and that things could no longer stay the same, he moved aggressively to add skilled nursing facilities as a first step in creating a continuum of services offered to seniors. In later years, Al would remark that he firmly believed that without that dramatic shift in direction, PHI would not have survived.

Inspiration can be harder to come by, because there is not the urgency of a crisis that points the way and overpowers resistance to change. Even when things are going well, inspired leaders reach out and call their team to a new set of expectations or a higher standard of performance. There are a number of specific things each of us can do when we lead during a period of change:

- Foster an ongoing expectation of change as an essential ingredient for success. Emphasize that change is needed when things are still going well.
- Build a case for why the change is needed – articulate benefits to the residents, the organization, and to current and future generations of staff. Paint a clear picture

what life will be like after the change.

- Engage your team in the change process – talk about what will be done, how it will happen, and how the communication process will work while the change is underway.
- Outline the step by step process that will take the group from where they are now to where they are going.
- Predefine how success will be measured and celebrate it when it is achieved.
- Give rewards and recognition to people who embrace change and move the organization forward.

One of the most current examples of inspiration driven change is illustrated in the culture change initiatives that are underway in many PHI locations. In almost every case, PHI facilities were the best in the marketplace prior to the culture change effort. It was a vision of a future where the needs and desires of residents would be met in new and exciting ways that began the culture change process and have moved it forward.

Finally, there are two sobering aspects related to leadership and change. First, the world is not a static place. If we fail to anticipate and lead change, circumstances will eventually become desperate and we will be forced to change, probably under extreme duress and threat to the organization’s existence. Secondly, change based on desperation can only work if it is followed by a strong dose of inspiration. Desperation driven change loses its power when the immediate threat is gone. Since the choice is ours, we know what we have to do. Choose inspiration!

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The Power of Encouragement - the Gift of Praise

We can all recall people in our lives that have shaped us as human beings – either personally or professionally – parents, teachers, neighbors, mentors or others. Their impact can be profound and long lasting. Looking closer at the nature of our relationships with these people, there is usually a strong pattern of encouragement that causes us to look beyond ourselves to higher goals and ambitions. Most of the people I know have a story to illustrate this truth, and I am no exception.

I came to work at PHI over 35 years ago as a registered nurse with a lot of youthful enthusiasm and very little experience. I had a great affection for older persons, and a good rapport with my co-workers, but had a very modest view of my future potential, especially since our pre PHI plans were focused on going into the mission field. Shortly after coming to work for PHI, Al Schartner (the CEO of PHI) and his wife Kathy visited us for dinner at our small apartment in Manheim. During our evening together, Al mentioned that I should think about my education and the need to eventually obtain a master's degree in preparation for major responsibility in the field of aging services. When they left, I remember remarking to my wife Rhonda, "I have been working here for less than 6 months and need 60 credits to get a bachelor's degree, and he is talking about a master's degree and a big future. Either this guy is a lot smarter than I am or he is nuts!" This turned out to be the first of many seeds of encouragement that changed my perspective, and altered the course of my life. In the 25 years we worked together, Al was always quick to notice my initiative and frequently went out of his way to point out my accomplishments to others.

This experience has made me keenly aware of the power of encouragement. It has been

said that the most powerful tool in the leader's toolbox is our personal attention – especially when it used to encourage those around us. Unfortunately many in leadership positions (knowingly or unknowingly) take the default approach to employee relationships. "I will tell you if you do anything wrong. Unless you hear otherwise from me, assume that you are doing OK." This outlook wastes a tremendous opportunity for good – both personally and professionally. S.N. Parker put it this way, "People have a way of becoming what you encourage them to be, not what you nag them to be."

It is not enough to simply highlight the need to encourage people as a part of our leadership style. There are a number of suggestions that are helpful in doing better as leaders:

- Encouragement needs to be a regular part of the communication with the people around us – not just something to do when performance review time comes around.
- Be generous in your praise of others – freely give credit to others for the good work they do and they will be inspired to do even better.
- Be genuine – insincerity or praise dispensed without sufficient cause can undermine the value of praise for real accomplishment or discourage others who are doing things that are more worthy of recognition.
- Be aware of those who work around you. You should be as good at catching people doing something right as you are about noticing when something goes wrong.
- Some people need more encouragement than others. Many of our employees have

difficult lives away from work. Your words of praise or encouragement may be the only positive feedback they may hear throughout the day.

In his book "Social Intelligence", Karl Albrecht identifies the need for Ritual, Ceremony, and Celebration as important ingredients in the life of every individual and organization.

Rituals confirm that certain valuable things do not change – values like respect and compassion. Ceremonies are times where we accept and confirm significant changes in our lives, and acknowledge and integrate the things that have changed. Celebrations formally mark emotionally certain events or achievements. If repeated, these can become rituals or ceremonies.

Presentation of Employee service pins and employee recognition events are a part of PHI's approach to meeting the need for ritual, ceremony, and celebration. These need to be complimented by facility specific events that encourage and praise our fellow team members. These are opportunities to, in the words of business author Dottie Gundy, "Give people credit for what they do, and to acknowledge people for who they are."

In the final analysis, we are all social creatures in need of encouragement and praise. This need is not a new development. It is deeply engrained in us as a basic human need. As leaders of PHI's ministry, we are in a position to meet this human need. Take full advantage of the opportunity to dispense encouragement and praise liberally.

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Integrity

Integrity is the foundation of every human relationship, including leadership within an organization like PHI. It can be defined in a variety of ways – like doing what is right, being honest or keeping your promises. Integrity is not a skill that can be acquired, it is an aspect of a person's character. Integrity springs from values that lie deep within a person based on a lifetime of experience. For PHI, integrity is a baseline. We expect integrity from everyone in the organization, but most of all, from those in leadership.

Ours is an environment that requires the highest standard of integrity. As a public charity we handle money that comes from customers, from public sources like Medicare and Medicaid, and contributed dollars. We record observations on medical records, administer medication, and operate under the supervision of a myriad of state and federal regulatory agencies. There are severe penalties associated with a lack of integrity – like the loss of a license to practice or prosecution for fraud. But beyond all of that, the basic ability to provide the services that our residents need and deserve is based on the integrity in our relationships with each other.

In his book *The Speed of Trust*, Stephen M. R. Covey lists integrity as the first of four core elements of trust. When discussing integrity he focuses on three areas:

- Congruence – where there is harmony between a person's intent and behavior. Behavior must be consistent with what you believe. Some people call this "Walking the Talk".
- Humility – putting principles ahead of self. Being more concerned about doing right than always being right.
- Courage – doing the right thing even when it is hard.

Generally speaking, a person can measure their own integrity by answering a few questions.

- What you do, or are willing to do, when you are convinced that no one else is looking?
- How you behave when you believe you have an advantage over another person?
- Will you tell the truth, even when it does not place you in the most positive light?
- Will you do the honest thing, even when it cost you more than you could otherwise get away with?

When it comes to the practical application of integrity in the performance of our duties a number of other questions emerge:

- How do we respond to a difficult resident or family member? Do we respond to their request or just try to placate them with empty promises?
- Are our dealings with vendors above reproach? Do we play favorites instead of going for the best product at the best price?
- What do you do when you see a friend violate a rule? Do you simply look the other way?
- Do you publicly support a work rule or policy but privately fail to enforce it?

Often as leaders the foundations of integrity begin with who we hire and how we discipline people. Starting with a person whose values demonstrate integrity is a must. In my 35 years with PHI I have regretted every occasion when I have hired someone when I had unresolved questions about their integrity.

Another frequent difficulty arises when someone of great talent and ability suffers a lapse of integrity that leads to their discharge from employment. In the termination process the question is often raised "Doesn't my superior performance entitle me to a break?" Of course the answer is no. Admittedly it is easier to discharge a sluggard who lacks integrity, but talent cannot be a substitute for honesty.

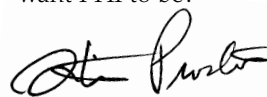
Where does integrity come from – what is its source? Some people have suggested that there are universal principles of integrity that cross cultural boundaries. I am not knowledgeable enough to make that kind of sweeping generalization. However, I do know that the roots of integrity are spiritual, and that the Judeo-Christian perspective that is the foundation for PHI's ministry is clear. Beginning with the Ten Commandments, the footprints of integrity are everywhere. In the book of Proverbs we read "An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips," and "Do not testify against your neighbor without cause, or use your lips to deceive". The New Testament references to humility have been the subject of earlier Reflections, and are too numerous to mention here. The instructions from God to Joshua in the first chapter of the book of Joshua repeatedly refer to the essential nature of courage in his new role as a leader. What is clear to me is that we need to look beyond ourselves for a moral compass that is not affected by the human tendency to rationalize our motives and behavior.

Any discussion on integrity is tempered by the realization that none of us is perfect.

However, when it comes to integrity, we are faced with a fairly simple choice – What kind of person do I want to be? Will I be able to respect myself if I lack integrity in my relationships with others?

When integrity permeates an entire organization, great things happen. The mutual trust that breeds superior performance is commonplace. Respect between staff members is fostered, and the organization becomes the kind of place where work can be a joyful experience.

Isn't that the kind of place where you want to work? Isn't that the kind of place we all want PHI to be?


Steve Proctor

Reflections on Leadership



RETIREMENT AND SENIOR
CARE SERVICES

September 2007

Celebrating 80 Years of Excellence 1927-2007

www.phihomes.org

Leadership & Love

Many years ago when I was getting my degree in business administration, the curriculum was focused on a scientific approach to management and leadership, with courses in statistics, quantitative analysis, and systems theory. Even classes on the human side of leadership had titles like "behavioral theory". As I began to apply this education to my work with PHI, it became obvious that in the real world of delivering products and services, excellence is only achieved when people care about their fellow employees and the people they identify as their customers. I learned that it is relatively easy to teach someone a new skill, but difficult to inspire someone to value other people and look beyond their own self interest when they come to work. Thirty years after taking my first college courses in business administration, I am more convinced than ever that the keys to success are not found in scientific formulas or principles, but in fostering positive human relationships. This conclusion has been consistently reinforced by my observations of the PHI family.

A few days ago I had the privilege of taking part in the presentation of employee pins at one of our facilities. This is a fairly common experience for me, and one that I enjoy immensely. I was able to give someone a 40 year service pin, a very rare occurrence in any organization. Talking with her after the pin presentation, this employee told me that she knew that her work made a difference, and that she truly loved the residents – even the most difficult ones. But there was more. She also said that she considered the people she worked with to be her friends. "The time has gone quickly. We have raised our children together, and shared joys, sorrows and disappointments. Over the years, coming to work was the best part of my day."

At the conclusion of the pin presentations one of the employees who had received a 5 year pin raised her hand and asked if she could speak to the group. I am always nervous about this kind of thing, but something told me that this was OK. She began by explaining that this has been a

tough year for her. She lost her teenage son in a tragic car accident. She went on to explain how this related to her work at PHI:

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.

At the end of this impromptu speech there was not a dry eye in the room. As she returned to her table to receive hugs from her fellow employees, I was humbled to be in the presence of such an extraordinary group of people. I also realized that a group that is willing to express love to each other is likely to extend that same compassion to the residents they serve on a daily basis.

A few weeks ago I had the opportunity to visit an employee that we had hired as a nurse in 1977. At the time she was hired, she was in her mid 50's. Now in her mid 80's she had just recently become too ill to work, and I was stopping at her home to give her a 30 year service pin. She regaled me with stories of the residents and staff that she loved during her 30 years with PHI. She told me about her employment interview, and that she had interviewed at several places at the same time. She had always said that she would never work in a nursing home, but when she visited the facility, she knew immediately that this was the place for her. She was treated with kindness and courtesy. Thirty years later, she knew that she had made the right decision.

How do these experiences relate to us as leaders? I think it comes down to creating a climate where people are free to express the best part of our humanity to each other and to the people we serve. This is reflected in many ways, most notably in who we select to be our fellow PHI employees, the behavior we model as their leaders, and the kindness we extend to everyone around us. This is how we as leaders make PHI a place where people care about each other.

In his book "Hardwiring Excellence", Quint Studer identifies three things that all employees want:

- They want to believe that the organization has the right purpose.
- They want to believe that their work is worthwhile.
- They want to make a difference.

Based on my experience, I would like to add another bullet point.

- They want to work in a place where someone cares about them.

Does this mean that everything will be perfect? Of course not. Hard decisions have to be made, and we cannot always do the right thing and be popular. We still struggle with budgets, getting meals out on time, delivering compassionate care when we are short staffed, and a host of other things. There is an old Chinese proverb that goes something like this, "Before enlightenment, chop wood carry water. After enlightenment, chop wood, carry water." We can never escape from the tasks of daily life.

However, as leaders we are called to look beyond the moment and focus on things that really matter. At PHI, that means focusing on our mission. The mission of PHI in its most compact form can be reduced to "Christian understanding, compassion, and a sense of belonging". We most frequently use this as a reference to the way we treat the people we have been called to serve – residents, families, constituents, and others. But it also applies to the way we lead this organization and how we treat our co-workers in this ministry. Employees want to work in a place where they are understood, are treated with kindness, and where they belong. Helping them to experience this in their daily work will go a long way to becoming an organization where excellence is consistently achieved.

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Using Your Gifts

In the summer time I have had the privilege of traveling with a group of people on a mission trip to Honduras. In this group of over 80 people are a range of skills and abilities – physicians, oral surgeons, dentists, nurses, pharmacists, maintenance people, interpreters, and general laborers, each has a special task. In the Spartan quarters of rural Honduras, there is a clear appreciation of our interdependence. Sometimes the most important people are those who restore the power when it takes one of its frequent breaks. Other times the soothing voice or a hug from a person at the intake center can have a calming influence that can be felt by the entire clinic for hours. It takes the combined talent of every person to make the trip successful.

I am profoundly aware that within the PHI family there are a wide range of gifts on our staff. Some have technical skills; medical knowledge and powers of observation; mechanical aptitude; skill in working with food; gifts of empathy, compassion, or kindness. Some of these skills may be more obvious than others, but they are all essential to fulfilling our mission. This is a truth that has roots in the Bible. Referring to the newly emerging church, the Apostle Paul in chapter 12 of the book of I Corinthians states:

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though its parts are many, they form one body... If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But God has arranged the parts of the body, just as he wanted them to be... As it is, there are many parts, but one body... If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

Paul goes on to explain that the gifts of people within the church are varied, and all are essential.

At PHI we are one body with many parts. As leaders, we need to emphasize the value of each and every part of the PHI body, and insist on a culture of respect that values each individual and their unique gifts. We must constantly ask the question “Do we understand and appreciate our own unique gifts, and are we using the gifts that God has given to each of us?” Secondly, “Are we enabling those we lead to use their gifts to the best possible advantage? Unless we can answer yes to both of these questions, we have not fulfilled our potential as leaders.

The answer to the first question is important. Each of us is accountable for how we use the gifts God has given to us. One of the most famous parables in the Bible is found in the 25th Chapter of Matthew. In this parable, a property owner leaves on a journey, and in his absence, entrusts his property to his three servants. While each one is given a different amount of money (interestingly referred to as talents – an ancient measure of weights applied to precious metals). They are given the freedom to use this money as they see fit, but will be required to report to the master about how they used it while he was away. Two of the servants invest wisely, and are rewarded when the master returns. The third, being deathly afraid of risk, buries the money in the ground. The master rebukes the third servant for wasting his “talent” and casts him out. The message is clear – do not let your talents go unused. It is also important to note that the money given to all three servants was not equal. Regardless of whether the talents were large or small, wasting it was clearly wrong.

The second question is equally vital. Almost every person, if properly led, can make a valuable contribution to the mission of PHI. Our effectiveness as leaders is to a great extent driven by how well we get the various individuals on our team to blend their skills in a way that produces the best possible result. We first have an awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of those we work with. The same is true for the new people we intend to add to our team. We also need to be aware of how the various skills and abilities of our team members compliment each other. No team can succeed if it is comprised of all one body part. As leaders, we are accountable for the gifts (talents) of those we lead, through prudent encouragement, cultivation, and correction. If our team is not performing well, it may be that we have not placed our team members in a position to use their gifts.

A final word about recognizing our own gifts and the gifts of those around us - Do not be fooled into trying to create a team by assembling a group of people with flashy gifts. Great gifts come in all shapes and sizes. It is impossible to construct an effective team when the leader is the center of attention or if the team contains “shining stars” that care more about polishing their image than achieving the mission of the organization. Remember, for better or worse, we are one body. We succeed together, or we will suffer together.

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Waiting on the World to Change

In an earlier Reflections on Leadership, I mentioned that when I was a child growing up in Michigan, our family decided to take foster children into our home. For a number of years, we had several foster children at a time, in addition to the 5 original brothers and sisters. Even though it was more than 35 years ago, it was an experience that has left a lasting impression on me. It was both rewarding and painful to help these children and to realize how many others needed the support of a loving family. Most of the time, the early lives of these youngsters had been defined by a series of hardships – poverty, neglect, and worse.

One of the puzzling aspects of seeing all of these children come into our family was how some of them ended up as victims of a bad start in life, while others were able to overcome enormous obstacles to become inspiring examples of the strength of the human spirit. My observations in the intervening years have only served to sharpen this contrast. The lingering question for me has always been how to explain the variation in outcomes when there is such similarity in genetics and environment?

I am not sure I have any magic answers, but it has caused me to reflect on a similar question as it relates to organizational performance. How can organizations with nearly identical resources and mission in the same line of work, produce such a wide variation in outcomes? How can one succeed in a hostile environment, while the other has little to show for their effort other than a series of excuses or explanations for why they cannot achieve their goals? From my perspective, the obvious answer lies in the character of the leadership of the organization. More specifically, it is the attitude of the leadership, and whether it sees itself as a victim of circumstance, or has a sense of empowerment as obstacles are met and overcome.

It is easy to fall into the mindset of being a victim. Our society at this point in our history seems to accept the notion that the terrible things in our environment makes whatever happens in life nobody's fault. One of my favorite musicians, John Mayer, recently had a hit album with the top single, "Waiting on the World to Change." It expresses the attitude of many people today – we want the world to be different and better, but our actions are futile. So we just wait for the world to change. If the world does change, then we will get back into the fray. This makes for good music, but if taken to heart, it can spell the death of an organization, or even a society.

Excellence in leadership takes a decidedly different approach. We all understand that the world can be a hard place, especially when the mission of the organization is focused on serving people who may not have the resources for the care they need. Medicaid budgets are tight, there are not enough skilled health professionals and service workers to go around, and there is an abundance of competition for residents, staff, and volunteers. But in spite of these obstacles, strong leaders know that they can make a difference. We are not powerless. We can change, innovate, make good decisions, and inspire others to join us in a vision to serve older persons in new and exciting ways. In our hearts we know that success or failure has roots in perception as well as reality.

I recall a study on the power of perception from my college years that went something like this:

A large pike was put in an aquarium that was divided by a glass partition. On the other side of the partition were placed a number of minnows. The pike naturally saw the minnows as lunch, but kept running into the glass partition. Eventually he ceased to chase the minnows. Later, the glass partition was removed, but the pike, still sensing that

it was futile to go after the minnows, starved to death, surrounded by his natural source of food. The power of perception!

Fortunately, we have the ability to change our behavior to create better results. A great example of this is found in Portia Nelson's, "Autobiography in Five short Paragraphs":

1. I walk down the street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I fall in. I am lost. I am helpless. It isn't my fault. It takes forever to find my way out.
2. I walk down the street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I see it is there. I still fall in. I can't believe that I am in the same place, but it isn't my fault. It still takes a long time to get out.
3. I walk down the street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I see it is there. I still fall in. It is a habit. My eyes are open. I know where I am. It is my fault. I get out immediately.
4. I walk down the street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I walk around it.
5. I walk down a different street.

In the provision of care and services to seniors there are many deep holes that can cause PHI harm. The first step in escaping the bonds of mediocrity is to understand that if we claim to be leaders we cannot be victims. We are accountable for our behavior, and are called to learn and change.

PHI has been blessed to have strong leaders at every one of our locations who are victors over circumstance rather than victims of circumstance. This is a key to our success, because we cannot afford to wait on the world to change.

Steve