



## LEADERSHIP

There is so much written on leadership that it is hardly worth discussing it in *ProsStars*. You, the reader, can read and study leadership as much as you wish—if you have time for it. There is plenty written on it—just go to Google and enter “leadership” and a plethora of material will be at your fingertips. Corporate gatherings, scientific meetings, and military indoctrination courses are full of it. By observation, most everyone who has been in a position of authority comes away from their jobs thinking they have the most original, new, best answers for good leadership and the best formulas for giving it to others. Read books by Jack Welch (GE), Rudy Guiliani (Mayor, New York City), Louis Gerstner (IBM), or Colin Powell (Secretary of State) for examples. We, in prosthodontics, do not write books on our versions of leadership, but we are no different. We know our brand of leadership works.

Let’s highlight a few leadership issues pertinent to dentistry and prosthodontics. We do NOT agree with the statement “leaders are not born, they are made.” Great leaders are born. Trying to teach some leadership traits to an intended leader might help, but it will not turn a born follower into a leader. It will not turn them into a good leader—and certainly not into a great leader. As we have said before, kittens born in the oven are not biscuits and “followers” going to leadership courses will not become leaders, at least not because of well-written course material.

By the same token, “you cannot teach good sense.” We should understand that any measures of good sense come with birth. Some people just do not get it or have it. Let’s emphasize that it does not hurt to read self-help books on leadership and it does not hurt to hear a lecture or two on leadership traits. But do not expect natural tendencies to alter to any degree—especially not to any degree of greatness. If given the job as leader, you can be assured that someone recognized or voted for your leadership traits as they saw them in your everyday actions. You were showing natural born leadership traits.

### **Definitions:**

#### Warren Ben’s:

“Leadership is a complex process by which a person influences others to accomplish a mission, task, or objective and directs the organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent.”

The American Heritage Dictionary:

Leadership (n).

1. The position or office of a leader: ascended to the leadership of the party.
2. Capacity or ability to lead: showed strong leadership during her first term in office.
3. A group of leaders: met with the leadership of the nation's top unions.
4. Guidance; direction: The business prospered under the leadership of the new president.”

Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary:

“Showing the capacity to lead. To guide on its way; to direct on a course; to direct operations, activity, or performance.”

Enough!

In any organization, there is always a person in a position of leadership. But leadership is like esthetics or ethics. It does not stand alone. We have good esthetics and bad esthetics; correct ethics and irresponsible ethics; and there is good leadership and bad leadership. On occasion, there are great leaders, even in dental practices, specialty training programs, dental school faculties, editors, presidents of organizations, hospital dental services and military organizations. Those great leaders are exceptional leaders—just ask their patients and office staffs. The followers know it and will verify it. More often, however, one may encounter only one or two great leaders during the course of a lifetime. A current reading, “His Excellency, George Washington,” describes a great leader. London’s new Winston Churchill Museum recognizes a great leader. Ben Franklin was a great statesman, but he was not a great leader. How about General George Patton, a great general, but he did not instill great followership. Lester Burket, former Dean of the University of Pennsylvania dental school, was a great leader, a quiet master of his profession and his dean’s position. Admiral Bob Elliott, a past Chief of the Navy Dental Corps, was a consummate leader, leaving no stone unturned in his quest to advance and perfect the dental treatment system he lead and the people in it. General Bhaskar, a past Army Dental Chief and world-renowned oral pathologist and periodontist, was a great leader of the same caliber. Seldom have we seen great leaders in these latter capacities and extending it up a notch—name one great leader who has held the chair of president of the American Dental Association.

The **ProsStars** leadership test (apply True or False to each statement):

**True or False**

- A leader’s first priority is to activate people, rather than placing emphasis on the management of materiel assets.
- Leaders set goals that are beneficial to the organization and to the people in it.
- Leaders see future opportunities for their organization far beyond those working in it, and lay plans to use these opportunities to full advantage.

- Leadership is synonymous with responsibility.
- A leader is truthful—always.
- A leader never asks someone else to do their “dirty work.”
- A leader can delegate individual responsibility and accountability, monitoring the delegated tasks. But the leader cannot delegate overall responsibility and accountability.
- Good leaders promote an open flow of communication in a non-threatening environment.
- Good leaders should insist on being full informed. Fully informed means receiving “all” information good and bad.
- The organization's people know that the leader cares for their personal and professional well-being.
- A good leader ensures that everyone in the organization is well suited to the job assigned, and that they are fully trained in every aspect of their jobs.
- A good leader is ever aware that the organization does not become complacent.
- A good leader insures that there is maximum staff empowerment with everyone being listened to in the decision process.
- A good leader prepares for a successor leader.
- A good leader prepares the organization’s people to accept and support a successor leader, if it becomes necessary.
- A good leader plans off work time to allow for relaxed, formative, good interactions between workers and between workers and management. A good leader enjoys having fun.
- A new leader is sensitive when contemplating takeover changes, understanding such changes should be gradual, using knowledge of corporate history, and considering the worth of workers who have dedicated time and effort in building the organization.
- Good leaders do not step aside, knowingly or unknowingly, thinking others will get the blame for any missteps or failures.
- A good leader gets out and about. A good leader is naturally “personable.” A good leader enjoys people.
- A good leader pays strict attention to fiscal matters.
- A good leader exercises fairness in every decision. In making a decision, two questions should always be asked. They are, “what will it hurt to say yes?” and “is it fair to all?”
- Good leaders breed good followers. It is a win, win deal.

You do not have to be a rocket scientist to determine that all answers are “True.” The traits do make one stop and think. Am I measuring up to my expected leadership goals? Am I doing the best for my staff, my faculty, and my officers? Am I paying more attention to “me” than I am to “them”? Can I better develop my inborn traits to become a better leader? A good exercise might be to have a third party or a management assistance group ask your staff what they expect from you. Would their list coincide with the above list? Are you meeting your staff’s expectations?

Another exercise, just as important if not greater, is what is your course of action if you are working for an individual who does not exercise good leadership traits? It happens and it happens all too frequently. What are the courses of action you can follow so that the problem is lessened, but your status, job or position is not jeopardized beyond repair? A common outcome is an antagonistic relationship, and usually the leader wins, no matter right or wrong. That is a

subject for another discussion, but its opposite is that even leaders have to deal with disgruntled followers because of misunderstandings in their leadership role. True or False: A good leader should quickly recognize a disgruntled follower and should have a sensible course of action to right the relationship. True. Will Rogers had it right when he said, “If you’re riding ahead of the herd, take a look back every now and then to make sure it’s still there.”

### **Hobson’s Choice**

Oh, yes—there’s one other characteristic of a leader that has to be taken into consideration. It is a trait applicable to any leader in any role but, we in the Navy, have paid special attention to it because it becomes the foundation of good leadership. It is a lesson that comes from the collision of the USS Hobson (DD464) and the USS Wasp (CV7) on the night of April 26, 1952 and the lesson of choice made by the ill-fated Hobson’s captain.

Hobson’s choice in this connotation refers to the tradition that with leadership one inherits a responsibility. It cannot be avoided. It comes with the turf. But with responsibility, comes authority. Most leaders seem to like that. But with responsibility and authority comes accountability. This accountability is not for the intention, but for the deed—and it never goes away during the term of leadership.

A *Wall Street Journal* editorial of May 14, 1952 recounts the Navy’s position as, “it is cruel, this accountability of good and well-intentioned men, but the choice is that, or an end to responsibility and finally, an end to the confidence and trust in the men who lead. Men will not long trust leaders who feel themselves beyond accountability for what they do, and when men lose confidence and trust in those who lead, order disintegrates into chaos, and the purposeful most likely become uncontrollable derelicts.”

Responsibility, authority, accountability—all necessary hallmarks of good and great leaders.

**NDW**