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Toxic vs. Visionary Leaders

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By Michelle C. Dziurgot, DDS
Editor-in-Chief

Toxic vs. Visionary Leaders

Unfortunately, toxicity is not viewed by toxic leaders as bad. They view themselves as “in charge,” and promote their own objective. . . . On the other side of the spectrum is the visionary leader. He or she sees the result, but gently guides their colleagues or their dental team to that ideal.

I would like to address leadership styles in my next few editorials, and in this issue I will discuss the topic of toxic leadership vs. visionary leadership.

Toxic leaders are demanding, yet they change the rules at every turn. Boards or organizations with toxic leadership are unable to keep up, since their leader promotes one direction and then changes midstream, not allowing the board or organization to proceed with well thought-out decisions. Toxic leaders of dental teams, whether they be the dentist or the office manager, demand perfection. Yet even when employees produce perfection, it's never perfect enough. This causes employee turnover; why stay when you're not appreciated for a job you're excelling at?

Unfortunately, toxicity is not viewed by toxic leaders as bad. They view themselves as “in charge,” and promote their own objective, even if their end target keeps changing. These leaders do not understand the downfall to the team and confusion they are creating. Toxic leaders do not understand why board members or colleagues are frustrated, or why employees keep leaving. They behave like dictators, or angry children having a meltdown. In organized dentistry, they may blame others for the association or society not moving into the future. In the office, they blame others for the turnover and upheaval. But a board or dental team cannot effectively service members or patients when their leader is continually changing the job at hand.

On the other side of the spectrum is the visionary leader. He or she sees the result, but gently guides colleagues or the dental team to that ideal. It is exciting to work with and for such leaders. They promote the team to perfection, but it's OK in their eyes to not be perfect along the way. There is no wrong mistake. Learning comes from mistakes. These leaders do not degrade their board colleagues or their employees, but use setbacks as forks in the road to get to the end destination.

There isn't only one road to travel. When a visionary leader draws teaching lessons from downfalls, it's motivational, not degrading. Visionary leaders will work toward the envisioned ideal and aid their colleagues and employees to keep focus on the result. Importantly, they also provide pleasure along that journey. There is support from a visionary leader. He or she is motivational.

Which type of leader are you? ●

Thoughts? Opinions? Why not share your views with other MDA Journal readers? Send comments to Editor Dziurgot at mdziurgot@michigandental.org.