

The Journal of the Michigan Dental Association

Volume 105 | Number 12

Article 7

12-1-2023

Be a Leader in Your Practice: What's Your Style?

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Recommended Citation

Chase, William DDS, MAOM (2023) "Be a Leader in Your Practice: What's Your Style?," *The Journal of the Michigan Dental Association*: Vol. 105: No. 12, Article 7.

Available at: <https://commons.ada.org/journalmichigandentalassociation/vol105/iss12/7>

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Be a Leader in Your Practice: What's Your Style?

By William R. Chase, DDS

I have been reading with interest the leadership editorials written and published by MDA Editor Dr. Michelle Dziugot the last few months in the *MDA Journal*.

Leadership has been an intriguing topic for me for most of my life. My interest began, believe it or not, back when I was in ninth grade when I was elected to my first leadership position, as Home Room president!

Fast-forwarding to the present day, this year marks my 50th year in Rotary. Ever since moving to southern California in 2005, I have had the opportunity to teach and facilitate sessions on leadership to Rotary members here. My involvement in Rotary's Leadership Institute, held quarterly, and the mandatory Presidents-Elect Training Session, held each February for the benefit of

preparing more than 600 incoming club presidents throughout seven western states, has truly been a beneficial opportunity for me to coach and mentor aspiring leaders.

With that being said, much of what I teach in Rotary is certainly applicable for current and incoming leaders in organized dentistry. Whether we own a practice, or work for one, leadership skills are important to cultivate. As dentists, we need to be leaders of our dental teams, and also help lead our patients to the highest level of care. And, as professionals we are often asked to serve in leadership positions, be they in community organizations, volunteer groups, or in organized dentistry.

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Be a Leader

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An important practice for any up-and-coming leader, first though, is to evaluate oneself through the concept of Emotional Intelligence. There are five main levels of self-evaluation in EI:

Self-awareness: How do I come across to others? Am I aggressive, laid back, or middle-of-the-road in my interaction to others?

Self-reporting: Am I truly able to control my emotions in social and professional settings?

Motivation: Am I able to motivate myself as well as others with whom I come in contact?

Empathy: Do I consider others and put their feelings first?

Social skills: How do I manage relationships and achieve goals? Do I have what it takes to be a credible and effective leader?

All of these steps are important to consider before attempting to assume leadership positions. If you're unaware of the concept of EI, I encourage you to read more about it. I think you'll find it very helpful in understanding yourself and interacting with others.

Now, on to some of the characteristics you may want to consider adopting into your own leadership repertoire. Remember, an effective leader is never

identified by just one leadership characteristic alone, but a variety of different styles, and there are hundreds out there! A few of the styles I would like to mention here are what I consider the more salient styles — Transformational Leadership, Situational Leadership, and Servant Leadership.

As dentists, we need to be leaders of our dental teams, and also help lead our patients to the highest level of care. And, as professionals we are often asked to serve in leadership positions.

The term *Transformational Leader*, was coined by the late leadership guru James MacGregor Burns in 1978 to describe political leaders. Since that time, it has gained traction in leadership training venues. Transformational leaders want to be counselors to future leaders; in other words, to “transform” them into the likes of themselves. They aim to be the ultimate “mentor.”

A *Situational Leader* is a leader who has the ability to evaluate situations as they arise and come up with realistic decisions that will beneficially impact his or her followers. It requires that a leader have the ability to tackle issues as they surface. This type of leader mustn't be surprised when different scenarios arise, and must be seasoned enough to deal appropriately with them when they do. Not all decisions these leaders will make in those situations will be correct in all cases, but the maturity to deal with them will take on a new level of importance.

Now to a style we all hope to aspire, not only in our leadership environment but in our own dental practices — that of *Servant Leadership*. Servant leaders ask, “What may I do for you?” as opposed to “What can you do for me?” The late Robert K. Greenleaf wrote the book, *The Power of Servant Leadership* in 1998. In it he stresses one of main characteristics of emotional intelligence, empathy for others.

This has been just a brief rundown of some of the aspects of leadership. I encourage you to learn more about leadership styles and how you can put them to use in your personal and professional life.

I'll leave you with something to ponder:

The current leadership expert and best-selling author John Maxwell said it best about being an effective leader in his book, *Developing the Leader Within You*. He asks, “Are you the type of leader people *want to follow*, or the type of leader who people *have to follow*?” ●

*Editor's Note: Both *The Power of Servant Leadership* by Robert Greenleaf and *Developing the Leader Within You* by John Maxwell are in print and available through Amazon or other booksellers. An excellent resource on emotional intelligence is *Emotional Intelligence 2.0* by Dr. Travis Bradberry and Dr. Jean Greaves.*

About the Author

William Chase, DDS, MAOM, a former editor of the *MDA Journal*, has also served as president of the Michigan Dental Association and the Michigan Academy of General Dentistry. He is a member of the International College of Dentists, the American College of Dentists, and the Pierre Fauchard Academy. He holds a master's degree in organizational management that he has used for the past 18 years to facilitate Rotarians in the principles of leadership. He is also the author of *In Chase of a Cause*, about his many years as a dental volunteer, serving in the Philippines and Brazil. Contact him at frndshp97@aol.com.



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