Ten Guiding Principles for New Leaders

Description

In 1996, I left the role of senior vice president of Holy Cross Hospital in Chicago, IL, for the role of administrator/president of Baptist Hospital, Inc., in Pensacola, FL. At that time, Mark Clement, the president of Holy Cross Hospital, gave me a gift. It was a letter with suggestions to help me get off to a good start at Baptist. I have regifted this to many people who were taking a new job. While I have adjusted it based on the changing environment, the core remains the same.

The pandemic has created many changes in leadership. Increasing operational pressures have caused many leaders to rethink their role. Itâ??s not unusual to have 30 percent of people in a leadership role to have less than three yearsâ?? experience. Then add in the election cycle in which new people will enter the public domain and bring in more changes.

For all new leaders who are navigating this uncertainty, here are some guiding principles. It is a combination of advice I received from Mark along with some of my own additions.

1. **When youâ??re new, there is lots of adrenaline. Donâ??t fight it.** Yes, eventually you will tire and need a break. However, run with the adrenaline and excitement while you can. When I started at Baptist, I loved the excitement of learning and meeting people. Like any new role, things took longer due to the learning curve, but I enjoyed it.
2. **Make sure your senior team is with you.** It is vital for any leader to be aligned with their team. For the top leader, it is even more important. My recommendation is to meet with all your direct reports after a few weeks. Share your expectations and what being â??all inâ?• looks like in great detail. Ask them what percent theyâ??re â??in.â?• If they say 100 percent, discuss what that looks like. If they say anything less, discuss what it will take for them to be 100 percent. It becomes fairly evident who has the will and skill. One CEO made two key changes after these discussions.
   When I started at Baptist, I made one change to the senior leader team very quickly. People are watching. This also led to more detail on what â??all inâ?• looks like. Sometimes people donâ??t realize their body language sends a message. One of the people on the senior team had a tendency to push his chair back from the table and sort of lean back. He didnâ??t do it on purpose, but people took that as a sign he wasnâ??t onboard. We had a conversation about

being careful so that others wouldnâ??t misread his body language.

3. **Always keep purpose in front of the organization.** Some call it the *why*. When employees have a sense of purpose, all sorts of good things take place. Regularly connect to why every role is vital.
4. **Be careful of people who tell you only what they think you want to hear.** Share these requests and questions: *Tell me where you think I am off the mark. Let me know if you feel me drifting. What concerns you about this action?* It is also good to have someone outside your circle weigh in. Some years back, a newly elected official asked what I thought about a potential advertising campaign the city was considering. This person was front and center in the campaign. Of course, there are times when this approach makes sense. This time, to me, it was overdone. My comment was, â??In my opinion, it comes off as narcissistic, and that will turn people off.â?• To this personâ??s credit, the campaign never ran.
5. **Even with good intentions, your own marketing department can position a top leader wrong.** This is similar to number 4. How many social media posts, photos, etc. featuring a leader are too many? Good leaders understand their job is to promote others, not themselves. Many times, the marketing department will feel unspoken pressure to make the top leader the star. Let them know it is not about you. This past summer in Highland Park, IL, there was a mass shooting. Victims, some injured, some dead, and some who would later die, were taken to the local hospital. Bart Kaericher, president and CEO of Aramark Healthcare+, flew from his office on the East Coast to be with the Aramark housekeeping staff. They had dealt with this horrific situation, cleaned up the blood, and faced other traumatizing experiences. Bart did not bring a camera crew. It was not posted on any social media accounts. I found out by accident. Be careful of photo ops. Leadership is about â??people opportunities,â?• not photo opportunities.
6. **Invest heavily in middle managers.** Most in an organization report to someone in middle management, the group of people in supervisory, manager, or director roles between frontline employees and the senior team. In fact, 90 percent of employees report to a middle manager. Middle management is a very difficult role. Invest in this group. One can tell the values of an organization by their investment made in development. Whoever has the best middle management team will have the best organization.
7. **Be aware of special privileges.** Top leaders lose credibility when their words donâ??t match their actions. For example, the top leader may say to the frontline staff, â??You are the most important people in the organization,â?• or, â??We are all the same.â?• But then the top leader has a special parking spot or cuts in line for food. When the leader breaks a rule that is in place for others, it creates resentment and sends the message that the rule isnâ??t really important. For example, the top leader shows up late for a meeting and the message is sent, â??You donâ??t need to be on time.â?• As a top leader, you are looked at by others with a magnifying glass, which brings us to the next pointâ?¦
8. **Walk the talk.** People notice. If you pick up paper, everyone will pick up paper. If you take people to where they are going (instead of just pointing), everyone will take people to where they are going. If you are on time, others will be on time.
9. **Be in the field.** Spend time with those doing the work. It is amazing what is learned when talking with managers and frontline staff. Plus, people want a leader who is approachable and willing to work side-by-side with them, one who will not ask others to do what they are unwilling to do. With the pandemic, there are those in top spots of healthcare who increased the loyalty of those in the organization and those who decreased loyalty. Those CEOs who gowned up and were in patient care areas on a regular basis gained respect. Those CEOs who called in from a home office to

talk with clinical leaders lost it. Each day, a leader has the opportunity to build respect or lose it.

10. **Be grateful.** As a leader, you have the opportunity to make life better for so many. Employees take you home. You are a part of conversations in cars and at the family dinner table. What do you want those conversations to be? My thought is you want those conversations to be positive. I work at a great place with great leaders. I am grateful for them. As leaders, we also need to be grateful to be in a position of influence and in a role where we can make lives better.

Being a leader has never been easy, and it isnâ??t easy now. However, along with the challenges come incredible rewards. It is my hope that if you are a new leader, or even a long-time leader who wishes to make some changes, you will find these tips helpful. Thank you for readingâ?¦I am grateful for you.

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