

# FDR: A MODEL LEADER IN TROUBLED TIMES

These are stressful times for health care leaders, perhaps especially stressful for Catholic health care leaders, who have the additional responsibility — and privilege — of attending to the mission as well as to the business of their organizations. “I am just overwhelmed with so much to do,” a chief operating officer of a Catholic hospital told me recently. Had she spoken publicly, I feel sure many heads would have nodded in agreement.



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On page 4, in an introduction to articles about “Making It Work at Work,” Brian Yanofchick, CHA’s senior director, mission and leadership development, reviews just a few of the challenges facing Catholic health care leaders in this era of health care reform.

Coincidentally, I have been listening to an engrossing audiobook about a leader who also faced exceptional challenges — a leader who had every reason to be overwhelmed by the troubles of his times, yet wasn’t. The book is *No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II*; the author is the talented historian Doris Kearns Goodwin.

Although I do not intend to jump into any of the controversies surrounding FDR’s legacy, two things continue to strike me about this president as I listen. One is Roosevelt’s unflagging optimism despite the enormity of world events; the other was his abiding belief in the ability of the American people to prevail in the face of grave dangers and overwhelming challenges. “His ebullience permeated every aspect of his leadership,” Goodwin says in an afterword to the audiobook. “He was one of the few statesmen of the 20th century, or of any century, British philosopher Isaiah Berlin wrote, who seemed to have no fear of the future.” And, “Although the United States was miserably unprepared for war in the spring of 1940, Roosevelt never doubted that the American home front would eventually win the war. ... To his mind, there was no danger too great, no challenge too profound to yield to

the combined efforts of the American people. He would provide the framework, the opportunities and the inspiration, and the people would do the rest.”

Evidence is growing to suggest that these two qualities in a leader — a positive outlook and faith in people to harness their energies and talent in times of challenge — stand to reap big benefits for anyone destined to lead in stressful times.

For example, research demonstrates that positive moods correlate with creative problem-solving — with the insight associated with an “aha moment” when analysis seemingly leads to dead ends. A brief summary of some of this research appears in an article in the *New York Times* (“Tracing the Spark of Creative Problem-Solving,” Dec. 6, 2010) — though scholarly articles and books on the subject abound.

Some of the articles in this issue focusing on the culture of the workplace likewise attest to the values of optimism and faith in others — specifically, faith in one’s employees to become partners in finding better ways to deliver safe, high-quality health care in difficult times.

As Yanofchick writes in his introduction, “the context of the current economy and the prospects of health care reform require a resilient, agile culture if we are to continue our service into the future. ... Highly engaged employees of high performance organizations report they perceive a workplace culture that allows their organization to regard change in a positive way and respond quickly to embrace new opportunities.”

We hope you will find in the articles ahead some ideas for building or strengthening just such a culture.

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