

Moving toward Transformational Leadership

BY RICHARD GLENN, PhD

Leadership is today a controversial topic. Almost every industry has identified it as a critical factor for success. A growing number of management experts criticize traditional leadership models, which, they claim, rarely produce the insights organizations need to improve themselves.

What is meant by leadership? It is not just an aspect of work. Indeed, leadership and work cannot be separated. Specifically, leadership should be about shaping a culture that nurtures a positive attitude toward work and reflects both a creative orientation and a trusting environment, one in which people can work for the love of the work itself, or, as Dorothy Sayers says, "for the sake of doing well a thing that is well worth doing."¹

Many contemporary leaders fail to understand that the work environment, which they help create, is the factor with the greatest impact on the organization's "bottom line." Those who shape healthcare systems are beginning to understand that organizational structure often determines employee performance. Effective structures inspire in employees commitment and a sense of membership, rather than mere compliance.

DIGNITY IS ESSENTIAL

Creating a positive work environment should be particularly important to Catholic healthcare organizations because they describe themselves as an apostolate, an extension of Jesus' healing mission, part of the Church's ministry of mercy and wholeness. Catholic organizations have, moreover, committed themselves to the values of a Christian service community, which recognizes the rights and responsibilities of employers and employees. Dignity in the workplace is integral to this vision.

If employees think of work as something they do for money alone, they overlook this concept of dignity, a fundamental reason for their existence. To help redirect such thinking, Catholic healthcare leaders should ask themselves the following questions:



Dr. Glenn is an organizational development consultant with Glenn and Glenn Associates, Hatboro, PA, and a licensed facilitator with the Expanded Learning Institute, Dayton, OH.

- Is our enterprise good? (rather than, Does it pay?)²
- Do we, who want to change the workplace, invite employees to grow through these changes?
- Does our work promote the glory of God, and does our workplace culture reflect the dignity of each employee?

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

The old "transactional" leadership—focusing only on outcomes—no longer suffices. Employees harnessed to such outcomes soon falter because the organization diminishes their individuality and fails to respect their personal lives. What is needed is "transformational" leadership—leadership dedicated to creating a culture that can align individual, community, and organizational goals.

Invest in Employees To achieve this, leaders must make a significant commitment to invest in employees as persons, whether through continuing education, expanded involvement, or personal acknowledgment. Such an investment is the first step toward shaping a healthy work environment. Employees in such an environment would find the work both satisfying in itself and an opportunity for developing caring interpersonal relationships. This, in turn, would create a culture in which people are willing to take personal risks and make sacrifices for the sake of performing a task well in the belief that, in doing so, they are contributing to the well-being of others.

Seek Surprises As Margaret Wheatley puts it, "Were we to become truly good scientists of our craft, we would seek out surprises, relishing the unpredictable when it finally decided to reveal itself. Surprise is the only route to discovery, the only path we can take if we're to search out the important principles that can govern our work."³ *Surprise* and *discovery* are words permitted only in organizational cultures that value workers and encourage risk taking.

Wheatley is talking about leadership and its impact on organizational culture when she asks,

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BICYCLE SAFETY

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A video on Derek's death helps publicize the importance of bicycle safety.

use at a very early age so that the 'helmet habit' will grow with the youth of Calhoun County. Our challenge is to provide an educational message in an entertaining way so that children respond," explains Stephen Abbott, president and CEO of Battle Creek Health System, which also distributes bicycle helmets to youngsters who come to its emergency department because of bicycle-related injuries.

The jamborees and other bicycle safety education programs are publicized through schools, churches, youth clubs, and businesses throughout the community. Local newspapers and radio and television stations promote and cover the events, and a local radio station broadcasts live from the jamborees. Fliers and posters are widely distributed in each hospital's city.

To help publicize the importance of bicycle safety, Battle Creek Health System has also produced a seven-minute video on Derek's death that features interviews with his mother and his nurse. Proceeds from the sale of the video to hospitals help purchase children's bicycle helmets.

"My wish is that no other parent would ever have to experience what I did. I want to let others know how very important it is for children to wear helmets every time they ride a bike," says Edwards. □

 For more information, contact Joel Schneck, public relations manager, Battle Creek Health System, 616-966-8132.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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The most effective leaders will create learning organizations.

"Wouldn't we all welcome more laughter in the halls of management? I would be excited to encounter people delighted by surprises, instead of the ones I now meet, who are scared to death of them."⁴

Promote Sense of Purpose Effective leadership creates a positive culture in which all employees can laugh and be joyful as they work. Such leadership also promotes conditions that enable employers and workers to achieve an inner strength and confidence in their capacity to pursue and realize their personal vision. This vision encompasses both employees' purpose in doing what they do and their ability to enjoy doing it. When employees realize this vision, they begin to see themselves as *leaders*, because their contributions do indeed influence and help shape the culture. At the same time, the culture, which is a collection of individuals, encourages each person to experience personal growth, which in turn serves other people—the ill, the wounded, and the poor.

LEADERSHIP'S CHALLENGE

Today many organizational cultures are in chaos, torn apart by competitiveness and the struggle to cut costs. All Catholic providers worry about healthcare becoming depersonalized—not only for patients but also for caregivers.

Catholic healthcare leadership must answer this question: How can we help each other to accomplish our first duty, to serve the work? "If our hearts are not wholly in the work, the work will not be good—and work that is not good serves neither God nor the community."⁵ Catholic providers need to take a deliberate, active approach in articulating a commitment to good work.


The most effective leaders will create learning organizations, which can, by

drawing on the collective intelligence of their constituencies, determine the best way to meet the challenges of today's healthcare marketplace. Denying employees' need to learn, grow, and express themselves through their work can only compromise patients' needs as well.

Catholic healthcare needs programs that promote transformational leadership. Initiatives can include the following:

- Allowing team members access to information concerning patient satisfaction, because it is precisely such satisfaction that inspires their work⁶
- Confronting problems involving employees with honest disclosure, effective communication, and constructive feedback
- Providing education and innovative approaches to clinical practices

However, programs alone cannot establish a healthy workplace culture. That goal can be met only through a full-scale commitment to honor and empower each employee. In a healthy culture, all participants—both those who deliver services and those who receive them—are treated as sacred, made in the image and likeness of God. □

 For more information, call Richard Glenn at 215-682-7885.

NOTES

1. Dorothy Sayers, *Creed or Chaos*, Sophia Institute Press, Manchester, NH, 1974, p. 63.
2. Sayers, p. 72.
3. Margaret Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco, 1992, p. 142.
4. Wheatley, p. 142.
5. Sayers, p. 63.
6. Barry Heermann, "The Spirit of Team," Expanded Learning Institute, Dayton, OH, August 1995, p. 11.