

## Editorial

# AΩA and leadership

Richard L. Byyny, MD

William Root displayed extraordinary leadership when he and other similarly minded medical students established Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society in 1902. They recognized a lack of appreciation for academic achievement, leadership, professionalism, teaching, service, and research in their fellow medical students and medical school faculty. Root decided to do something positive about it. His leadership vision for AΩA, to promote and advocate for high academic achievement, leadership, professionalism, service, research, and teaching continues today. Now, more than a century later, we need highly effective leadership in medicine, medical education, and health care.

AΩA has done well in selecting leaders in medicine. Fifty-one Nobel Prize winners in Physiology or Medicine and in Chemistry are members of AΩA, exemplifying leadership in science. Nearly seventy-five percent of deans of medical schools in the United States are members of AΩA. Many other members of AΩA are excellent leaders in academic medicine, medical societies, hospitals, clinics, and communities. Unfortunately for medicine, many other AΩA members with leadership potential have not chosen to lead, at least in formal leadership roles.

I believe this is a lost opportunity for medicine, education, and health care, as well as for many of our AΩA members. Leadership is about making a positive difference and every AΩA member has opportunities to make a difference and provide leadership. I believe, therefore, that all AΩA members should consciously consider making the commitment to serve as leaders and to make important contributions to our profession, patients, and society.

### Preparing for a position in leadership

Leadership for most people is learned through education, observation, and experience. Developing into an excellent leader requires more than motivation—it is an ongoing, continuous process. One needs to recognize the challenges and opportunities and then proceed to lead, and in doing so, to make a positive difference.

I have been a student of leadership

since I was a history major in college. Since then, I have read extensively about leadership, been mentored by excellent leaders, and identified many leadership opportunities. I have also engaged in many leadership experiences where I thought I could make a difference. I have learned much about leadership through this process. Let me share with you some of my experiences—maybe you will recognize your own ability to become a future or more effective leader.

In my opinion, the best and most effective sustainable leadership is grounded in clear professional values, caring, and a dedication to serving others. I recommend reading and reflecting on the writing of two authors: Jim Collins, who wrote *Good to Great* and *Good to Great in the Social Sector*; and Robert Greenleaf, who wrote *Servant Leadership*. Great leadership is about doing the right thing in service to others.

### Servant leadership

I remember meeting with a hospital director, a Catholic sister, in a hospital located in a neighborhood that was in transition in a large city. She was the most effective leader in a hospital I had ever met and observed. Her hospital had the highest census, the most satisfied patients and staff, and the best outcomes in the region. I asked her where she had earned her Hospital Administration degree. She told me she didn't have a degree. She said she had learned to always ask the question when making decisions, "What is best for the patients?" That was her fundamental value: Doing what she knew was right.

Servant leaders live, lead, and act their values based on their inward sense of what is right. Servant leaders also inspire others to care and serve. They develop the best within others. They instill a set of values, including fairness (justice), honesty, respect, contribution, and trust. These leaders follow truth and principles. They share values and trust among team members. This leads to moral authority in the leader and team.

Servant leaders and their teams dedicate themselves to a higher purpose, cause, or principle worthy of their commitment instead of focusing on themselves. They find joy, self-respect, and integrity in being used in the service of others and in contributing to an important purpose. Servant leaders



<b>Characteristics of Servant Leaders</b>	
Listening	One parable states, "Grant that I may not seek so much to be understood as to understand." Communication is very important, but it starts with listening intently and receptively first. You can better understand the will and point of view of a person or group by listening. Later reflection on what was said can lead to enhanced understanding and increased respect.
Empathy	Servant leaders work to understand and to empathize with their teams and others. Empathy is developing the awareness of the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of others without having those experiences yourself. We show empathy by respecting other's views, while not necessarily agreeing with them.
Healing	Recognize that those who are being served and those involved in serving share a goal of healing. The collaborative search for wholeness is part of the compact with the servant leader.
Awareness	Be vigilant in observing events and interactions, recognize what is happening, and then draw inferences from what you observe. Be mindful and perceptive in using your knowledge and experience.
Persuasion	Servant leaders rarely use positional authority, relying more on value-based authority or persuasion. They work to persuade others to adopt a point of view through teaching, and using knowledge, facts, and opinion to convince others to accept their views.
Conceptualization	This is the ability to conceive and think logically and to evaluate information, issues, events, plans, dreams, visions, and futures beyond day-to-day realities.
Foresight	This is the ability or art of using knowledge of historical and current events and related situations combined with an understanding of possible consequences to predict the likely future. Foresight allows you to develop intuition, the ability to know or understand something without proof or evidence.
Stewardship	This involves commitment to the careful and responsible management of an organization or people entrusted to one's care. In servant leaders it involves first and foremost a commitment to serving the needs of others and in this context relies mostly on openness, caring, trust, and persuasion.
Humility	This involves being humble, valuing other people, and treating everyone with respect. Too many ineffective leaders are noted for hubris or self-aggrandizement, taking personal credit for what is the work of many. In doing so, they demonstrate an unflattering arrogance.

engage their teams in creating a shared vision—a compelling picture of the future—based on values. They inspire others to dig deep within and to use their knowledge, experience, and talent both independently and interdependently to serve others through this shared vision. Great leaders are passionate about achieving their vision in the context of caring and doing good.

Greenleaf emphasizes a set of characteristics fundamental to good servant leaders. I have modified the list for this article.

Servant leadership involves caring, passion, commitment, values, having a positive and realistic attitude, teamwork, and service to others both within and outside of the team or organization. Servant leaders lead by expression, humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, stewardship, and providing vision and direction.

**Great leadership**

I assume that those of you who want to lead want to be great leaders rather than just good leaders. Jim Collins argues that the enemy of "great" is "good." Many are satisfied with being good at what they do, but the leaders who will make the most difference are those who want to be great, and want their teams or organizations to be great. A great leader or organization delivers superior performance and makes a positive, important, and distinctive difference over a long period of time.

Servant leaders work with their teams to define what it means to be great in what they do and how they serve. Good-to-great principles apply to the not-for-profit social sector and to servant leaders as well as they do to the private sector. However, for servant leaders and in the social sector the outputs are caring, service, and helping others rather than profits. The measurement of success is how effectively we deliver on our mission and make a distinctive impact relative to our resources. A consistent and intelligent method of evaluating caring and service allows us to assess improvement—or the lack thereof. In the social sector, as in the for-profit sector, it is useful to set audacious goals.

Good-to-great starts with what Collins refers to as "level 5 leadership." Level 5 leaders are passionate about and committed first to the cause, movement, mission, or work—not themselves—and have the will and commitment to succeed. They build enduring greatness through a blend of personal humility and professional will, commitment, and perseverance. The servant leader does not have the executive power to make most important decisions alone. In medicine, health care, and education, executive power is usually impractical. In our realm, leadership sets a positive example, taps idealistic passions, and uses persuasion, inclusion, communication,

language, inspiration, shared values, common interests, a sense of community, teaching, balance, discipline, teamwork, and delegation of responsibility to get things done.

Level 5 leaders must be role models and always work as hard or harder than everyone else. They are willing to do whatever jobs need to be done. They are passionate and caring, self-motivated, self-disciplined, and compulsively driven to do the best they can. Servant leaders know their teams share their vision, and they develop and support the best teams of people who are motivated by their service and professional values.

Great leaders need to ask the question: What is the one thing at which our organization can be the best in the world? They focus on that goal and develop a plan to reach it. For most of us, that is a social objective to meet human needs. Once others see tangible results, people will line up to contribute and to “push the wheel” that creates momentum.

The servant leader and team must define how to produce the best long-term results. This involves first understanding what the organization stands for, why it exists, and what its core values are. In other words, what the leader and the team can do best is determined by understanding how the team can uniquely and effectively contribute to the people it serves.

The next greatest need, and a difficult one to achieve, is finding the resources—especially the right people—to do great work, and saying no to things that may impede achieving the vision and service.

Servant leaders celebrate the work and success of those contributing and serving and express appreciation regularly. Remember: Everyone matters and everyone can, and does, make a difference in serving.

### **AΩA and leadership in medicine**

Most medical students, physicians, and AΩA members have already learned, developed, and practiced many of the elements of servant leadership, including:

- Competence
- Altruism
- Caring
- Service
- Knowledge
- Attitude
- Skills
- Professional values
- Listening first to understand
- Examining and using data
- Deductive reasoning
- Using probabilities to make decision even with uncertainty

- Working with others who know more about some issues and problems
- Making decisions
- Evaluating the results
- Communication and teaching
- Working with teams
- Continually learning
- Aspiring to be the best.

However, many do not recognize their potential for leadership and how to utilize their knowledge, skills, and experience as physicians to lead. Each of you needs to make a conscious choice to aspire to lead, and then seek opportunities to serve as leaders.

Leadership in medicine, education, and health care is more important now, in the twenty-first century, than ever before. Physicians know best what medicine, medical education, and health care are about. Physicians know the core values and professional values of medicine. Physicians have professional experiences serving and caring for people, and working with others in the health professions. Physicians know about clinical medicine and clinical insight. Physicians understand education of students and residents. Physicians understand the vital importance of medical and scientific research. Physicians have earned respect for their caring, service, values, commitment, hard work, teaching, and manifold other contributions. These are integral parts of the professional life of a physician. Physicians should be more effective servant leaders in medicine, medical education, and health care because of their special professional knowledge, skills, and experiences. To best utilize these special professional attributes, qualities, and experiences, physicians should aspire to become leaders. They can then learn to be effective servant leaders who lead based on caring, service, and professional values.

Leadership and management skills can be taught and learned by motivated physicians. I urge members of AΩA and other physicians to ask themselves where and how they can provide leadership. Making the conscious decision to be and act as a leader is of utmost importance to medicine and society.

How can Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society both select potential leaders and support those who choose to become leaders in medicine, education and health care? Send me your thoughts at [r.byyny@alphaomegaalpha.org](mailto:r.byyny@alphaomegaalpha.org).

Richard L. Byyny, MD  
*Executive Director, Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society, and Editor of The Pharos*