

Leadership, Power, and Promoting Good Health

Leadership may be one of the easiest disciplines to study because all you need to do is look around you. Examples — the good, the bad and the ugly — are available for your review and reflection everyday when you take notice. I've considered leadership one of my most edifying professional journeys; like sailing or chess, the fundamentals are easy to learn but mastery is a lifelong pursuit replete with peaks and valleys. Though I've had work and fellowships that have afforded me close connections with extraordinary leaders, being intentional about watching my most accessible mentors is the most instructive for appreciating leadership basics. My Mom, who had 11 children, imprinted me for life with the meaning of hard work. Colleagues regularly offer exemplary insights into how to mobilize others for action. And often, it's interacting with my professional network that affects my vision about where our field could be going.

So, what are the leadership basics? Leadership books abound, but having done a mashup over the years of leadership gurus (my favorites are Frederick Herzberg, James McGregor Burns, Jim Collins, and Michael Porter), there are 4 primary sources of power leaders use to influence others and drive change: position power, rewards power, knowledge power, and relationship power. Most leadership books focus on how to win in business rather than how to lead a population toward health. So, though these

principles certainly apply to our field, I'd also add authenticity power as vital to leadership in health promotion. Popular leadership books typically feature profiles from major industries and renowned companies but our nascent health promotion movement also already has a wealth of success stories.

You can use teachings from leadership scholars and health promotion leaders on these 5 sources of power to promote the health of those you serve.

To see how power has been put to good use in our discipline, I need look no farther for a prime example than someone who's always been accessible to me and *Health Promotion Practitioner* readers. Indeed, "the pen is mightier than the sword" was born out of reflections on fundamentals of power, and for over 20 years I've admired the influential leadership of Dean Witherspoon, Managing Editor of this publication as well as the President and founder of Health Enhancement Systems.

- **Authenticity Power.** This bromide applies to health promotion leaders more than leaders in other fields: "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." Helping professionals are hard pressed to follow those who don't share their passion for service and, in our field, demonstrate a commitment to health. A significant component of Dean's credibility as a health promotion authority comes

leadership inhealth promotion



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...by Paul Terry

from walking his talk. The photo on page 9, with his son Geoff after a bout of mountain hiking (their favorite family wellness activity) is a testimonial. In our field, leaders need to testify: visibly and daily.

- **Position Power.** Forming and building a small company will earn Dean the respect of others who know how tough it is to sustain a business. Adding the Managing Editor title substantially broadens his power base; it is a position that has enabled him to decide what ideas and case examples thousands of practitioners have been exposed to since 1992. There are few things more powerful in any field than being promulgator and gatekeeper of valuable information.
- **Rewards Power.** I can't speak to Dean's payroll approach, but I hope he and his colleagues are commanding big bucks. Herzberg is probably best known for his research into how financial incentives affect motivation. In short, if we think we're fairly paid it's not a big motivator but if we feel like we're

not equitably compensated it is demotivating. What I can speak to is Dean's philosophy of rewards. I concur with his strident advocacy to keep financial incentives in perspective as a minor factor in engagement, with serious negative unintended consequences if not used well. More important, this newsletter, with its wonderful profiles of wellness professionals and case studies of exemplary programs, has become a model for our field of how to reward through recognition

I've been reading his advice, it is that wellness is personal. There are no short cuts. Dean writes eloquently about the time honored tenet that making progress in engaging a population in wellness takes boots on the ground. And he writes often about how engagement is best measured through the quality of relationships among health promotion practitioners,

That's the irony of power — it's essential to leadership but for many (perhaps most) it's a cross to bear, not a sought-after goal. Thankfully, exercising responsibility in our field is most often personally rewarding

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- for a job well done.
- **Knowledge Power.** Health promotion is a field for thought workers. We're not assembling widgets; we're applying principles of individual behavior and community change. Dean launched a company built to support health promotion knowledge workers after a successful stint managing one of the world's largest and most complex worksite wellness programs — it still garners accolades. Leaders need followers, and Dean has so many because clients who use his programs and subscribers who read his articles recognize they are entrusting their precious time and resources with an accomplished expert.
- **Relationship Power.** If Dean has espoused a theme more recurrent than any other over the many years

wellness champions, organization leaders, and associates/employees.

As you consider where you stand in exercising these 5 sources of power, I hope you pause to consider what power means to you. Dean Witherspoon provides a compelling and accessible example of someone who has considerable leadership power in health promotion. He comes at power with humility and common sense; I doubt he actively sought it. Herb Kelleher, former CEO of Southwest Airlines, is profiled often in business journals because of his charismatic leadership style. He recently told *Fortune*: "Power should be reserved for weight lifting and boats. Leadership really involves responsibility."



because the kind of power that matters most relates to who you are, not the positions you hold. I've not asked Dean, but I suspect he and I would agree that in health promotion, our sources of power for moving a population toward health, in order of importance, are: authenticity power, relationship power, knowledge power, position power, and reward power.

Future columns will discuss each of these leadership tools for advancing health and how they change in order of importance according to an organization's needs. 📖