

## ► PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Priscilla Oliver, PhD

## Environmental Health Leadership: Where Do We Go From Here?

All of us should help leaders to lead. There is a demand for good quality leadership all around us. Leadership affects us all as we are either leading and/or being led. It is the way of life. I submit that there are different kinds of leaders and we tolerate, overlook, or celebrate them. Perhaps you are leaning to be more involved with environmental health leadership to become a leader or a better leader.

I feel compelled to discuss this topic as I begin my presidency. I have studied and taught leadership in graduate school and practiced leadership in social and educational settings, nonprofit organizations, and federal levels of government. It has been a delightfully rewarding long-term adventure. I am a student, professor, and practitioner of leadership.

First, we are taught that there isn't a single way to lead. There are numerous models (e.g., situational leadership), theories, and thoughts on leadership. The literature and quotes are massive and growing. Are leaders born or made? Some would argue they are born. You are born with traits and into some leadership positions. It is genetic and you build on that and leap or creep into it. Most would say that many of our leaders in environmental health are made.

I refer to the following quotes:

"Leaders are made, they are not born. They are made by hard effort, which is the price which all of us must pay to achieve any goal that is worthwhile," Vince Lombardi, football player, coach, and executive in the National Football League.

"Leadership is lifting a person's vision to high sights, the raising of a person's perfor-

*There is a demand for good quality leadership all around us.*

mance to a higher standard, the building of a personality beyond its normal limitations," Peter Drucker, management consultant, educator, and author.

Hard work is the price that you generally pay to become a leader in a specific area. For environmental health it means you get the education, degrees, training, credentials, and the varied exposure and work experiences to help you stand out in the pack. You mirror the background of other leaders and add more to what others have.

Every profession is engaged in recruiting, educating, training, counseling, developing, motivating, and planning for a better future. We learn best from each other and we also can learn from other professions. Medicine as a profession does a great job in screening, recruiting, training, and developing physicians to take on leadership roles in health-care. The requirements and paths are well defined. There must be constant movement and nourishment of leaders and followers. Yes, leaders are followers just as followers are leaders. Succession planning in environmental health is also no exception and should be better handled.

This column is a call for quality environmental health leadership! With the threats on the environment, challenges surrounding our profession, politics against us, daily disasters, limits on funding, etc., we need better leaders and followers. Be a better follower to become a great leader. It takes time to reach the ultimate goal. Carry the torch well until it is time to pass the torch. Quality leadership allows leaders to develop and grow. There is also just so long that one can lead. Some have more time than others. Thus, the role of helping others to develop comes into play. Again, the reality of succession planning is also needed. We question, "Who will take the place of our current leaders?"

"You must wait for your turn," is often said. The plans and destiny are well laid. Leaders often know when it is their time to lead. You must know when to apply, run, produce, hold, and fold. Allow yourself the nourishing and growth that are needed. You must be able to withstand and be productive. No, you will not know all the answers. No one knows all the answers. Adversity and challenges often help us to grow.

Let us get ready for our future. One must develop the prerequisites of leaderships. The qualities of good leaders are many and not all are included here. I will mention a few. Leaders have vision, understand the mission of the organization, develop strategies, and exhibit passion toward the profession. They are professional and uphold and market the professionalism of environmental health. Commitment, creativity, innovation, purpose, and having a designed platform are in the fabric of a leader. Leaders know

some history and are aware of the gossip and grapevine, too. Leaders are good speakers and writers. They inspire others to do their best and become a helpful member of the team. Working with them is not like work, instead it is a joy. The completed work is the measure of quality leadership, not the time spent as a leader. The spirit of leadership is overcoming, enchanting, and not easily measured in time.

Leaders, get ready for our future. Work to help yourself and remember others. Keep up your skills, attain new knowledge, and remember what was already learned. Knowledge often circles back in a new format and different name. Coordinate, collaborate, partner, and network to improve yourself and the profession. Do not be shy—express your ideas and work for the common good.

Let us sharpen up on some of the Ps and Bs. Thomas J. Sergiovanni has written about the Ten Principles of Leadership, which proposes a 10-P model of quality leadership—prerequisites, perspective, principles, platform, politics, purposing, planning, persisting, peo-

pling, and patriotism ([www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/journals/ed\\_lead/el\\_198202\\_sergiovanni.pdf](http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/journals/ed_lead/el_198202_sergiovanni.pdf)). I would also add passion.

Be the example and model for others to follow. Be part of the buy-in. Be inclusive, not exclusive. Be labor law savvy and follow the proper procedures and rules. Be ethical and preserve your integrity. Be trustworthy. Be supportive of followers. Be present and attentive to the culture. Be a civil rights advocate and follow the procedures and rules with all staff. Again, be green, blue, and yellow. Be the recruiter of good people, resources, and funding. Be the change that is needed. Be a thoughtful servant leader. Be a good listener. Be yourself. Be a better you. Be relevant.

Another important quote to take note of is: “Leadership should be born out of the understanding of the needs of those who would be affected by it,” Marian Anderson, singer.

As I finish my week of vacation in Galveston Island, Texas, I am reminded of the importance of plants, animals, land, air, water, and people. The order in which they all toil is very special. Birds respect leader-

ship, flock together to make long and short trips, and take care of each other. The water and air continually replenish and remain useful to life. Ants and bees are so organized, builders of dwellings, and respect the order of leadership and work assignments. Trees and plants offer their support and just keep growing, offering us fresh air, beauty, and inspiration. People work and play daily. Nature teaches us so much, is a vital part of our profession, and gives us so many lessons on leadership.

Please join me in helping our profession with quality environmental health leadership. Our profession needs more student involvement, internships, expert training, progressive education, productive working conditions, advocacy, and inclusion for women and diverse groups. All of us should help leaders to lead. Let us lead and follow in environmental health with quality and understanding to ensure that we “Make America Green Again.” 🐝

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*Thank you.*

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