



Symposium on Educational Excellence 2024

The foundation for being a leader

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Abstract

The health of most of the world is managed by community workers who have little authority, few resources, and minimal education, but who must bring forth leadership amidst difficult and emergent circumstances.^{1,2} Similarly, in the United States the stewards of public health are front-line workers who are called upon to bring leadership to critical circumstances, often without access to resources, and almost always without positions of authority.³ There is a need for an innovative educational approach to developing leadership among future health professionals that can reliably provide them with access to being leaders powerfully and exercising leadership effectively regardless of the circumstances.

However, as stated by Joseph C. Rost in *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century*, “Most of the research on leadership has emphasized the same two items – the peripheral aspects and the content of leadership – and almost none has been aimed at understanding the essential nature of what leadership is.”⁴ (p. 4). Examples of “peripheral aspects” – taught in most courses on leadership – would be the traits, styles, or personality characteristics of leaders, and what noteworthy leaders have done in different situations. Unfortunately, education that focuses on the peripheral aspects of leadership provides no access to the nature of leadership, and no access to actually being a leader in the critical moment, when there is no time to plan.

In this workshop we will introduce an innovative educational approach that will guide participants to discover for themselves the “essential nature of what leadership is.” The workshop is derived from “Being a Leader and the Effective Exercise of Leadership” which is a six-day, intensive course delivered in 29 countries and in U.S. institutions such as Texas A&M, the United States Airforce Academy, Dartmouth Medical School, and UCLA (<https://beingaleader.org/>). The workshop will explore one aspect of that larger course, the Foundation for Being a Leader. The Foundation for Being a Leader is taught as part of the OHSU/PSU School of Public Health MPH program, in the course CPH 528, Management Practice and QI in Health Care. Students report producing breakthroughs for themselves in specific areas of their lives requiring leadership, including generating leadership in their current public health responsibilities.

The question explored in the workshop is, what is the foundation for leadership; what can be done to establish a strong and consistent groundwork from which leadership can reliably be generated? Five key distinctions comprising the foundation, derived from the larger course, will be explored during the workshop. The distinctions will be presented in an interactive format, allowing participants to question what is presented, look into their lives, identify their own real-life circumstances relevant to the foundational distinctions, and specify actions to be taken to build their personal foundation for leadership. The instructor will interact one-on-one with individuals, and participants will interact with each other. Participants will be called upon to identify specific situations in their lives where actions may be taken to build a foundation for leadership. They may choose to share their discoveries openly with the group, or maintain a private discourse; either way is effective.

This workshop will contribute to the objectives of the Symposium on Educational Excellence in two ways. First, the topic – leadership – is poignantly imperative for health care workers. Second, the approach – one of discovery and self-generation rather than knowledge translation – promises to be a new, empowering context for education in general.

By the end of this workshop, participants will create a foundation for leader and leadership which will provide them with access to being a leader and the effective exercise of leadership as their natural self-expression.

References

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