



Learning From a Lifetime of Leading Effective Change



Claire Johnson DC, MEd^{a,*}, Gerard Clum DC^{b,c}, Wright L. Lassiter Jr. EdD^d,
Reed Phillips DC, PhD^e, Louis Sportelli DC^f, James C. Hunter^g

^a Professor, National University of Health Sciences, Lombard, IL

^b Director, The Octagon, Life University, Marietta, GA

^c President Emeritus, Life Chiropractic College West, Hayward, CA

^d Chairman, Board of Trustees, Parker University, Dallas, TX

^e President Emeritus, Southern California University of Health Sciences, Whittier, CA

^f President, NCMIC Mutual Holding Company, Clive, IA

^g Author & Principal of JD Hunter Associates, LLC, A Leadership Training & Consulting Firm, Detroit, MI

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Abstract

Objective: The purpose of this article is to report on the opening plenary session of the Association of Chiropractic Colleges Educational Conference—Research Agenda Conference (ACC-RAC) 2014, “Aiming for Effective Change: Leadership in Chiropractic Education, Research and Clinical Practice.”

Discussion: Speakers with extensive backgrounds with implementing substantial change on a broad level shared personal examples from their experiences in education, research, political organizations, and clinical practice. They described efforts, challenges, and opportunities that are encountered in order to implement effective change and shared their personal thoughts on leadership.

Conclusion: Each of the speakers shared their diverse, unique insights and personal experiences to convey the process and meaning of leadership.

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Introduction

Leadership may be defined by one's actions and ability to direct others towards a common goal.¹

Successful leaders establish direction and vision, communicate goals, and are able to develop coalitions and alliances. Although leadership seems to be an elusive concept, it is one that most people agree is necessary to promote effective change.

Being a strong leader does not necessarily imply that change is always for good. The world has seen leaders, such as Adolph Hitler or Jim Jones,² who were able to

* Corresponding author. 200 E Roosevelt Rd, Lombard, IL.
Tel.: +630 297 3290.

E-mail address: cjohnson@nuhs.edu (C. Johnson).

motivate people into action; but their actions were devastating. As well, just because someone is popular enough to be voted into a position of leadership does not make that person a good leader. Therefore, a leadership position itself is not enough for us to aspire to. We must look beyond the title or position and understand the qualities that are necessary to implement change and, through good leadership, for us to improve the chiropractic profession.

Historically, chiropractic has had its share of good and bad leaders. How can one recognize good from bad? If a person is in a “leader” position but is focused on himself, group efforts aim to satisfy his self-aggrandizement instead of what is best for the group. Unfortunately, a position of power is a magnet to those who use others for their own gain. To be an effective leader, one must focus on the destination that is best for the group. A good leader focuses on moving the group towards a better future and is willing to endure difficult times to get there. By focusing on the best interest of the group, a good leader becomes selfless. As history has shown, sometimes it is not until years have passed that we can truly distinguish the good from bad leaders. Fortunately, each of us can make the choice as to what type of leaders we follow or what type of leaders we wish to be.

I have participated in a variety of research, educational, leadership, and agenda conferences over the past 20 years. From these meetings, I have noticed several themes emerge. Dedicated people have met and developed lists of action steps, great ideas, and potential plans; but few of these are fully carried out. Once the meeting has concluded and the documents have been published, somehow the group expects that the “leaders” will magically implement them. Certainly we have limited resources, but the lack of follow through may be caused by not engaging others in the call to take action. We need more people to participate in the leadership process. A good friend once told me that “after the meeting someone must do the work” and that is where leadership begins.

I often hear that the chiropractic profession needs to have better, stronger, or more effective leaders. I hear, “*They* need to do something about the problems that our profession is facing.” I wonder who is the “*they*” that everyone is talking about? Have we forgotten that each of us is a participant in the profession and it is our responsibility, not the responsibility of others, to move our profession forward? Each of us must commit to being a part of the solution if the chiropractic profession is going to thrive.

We need others to see what we are seeing in order to create the path to achieve a better future. We need to

reach out and expand our leadership potential and inspire all doctors of chiropractic to lead from where they currently are. This may mean that each of us begins with leading ourselves, and then we can move on to leading others by expanding our circles of influence. We need to encourage our chiropractic practitioners, educators, and researchers, who are supportive in spirit, to engage and be part of the solution through personal leadership.

The chiropractic profession is made up of a small but mighty group of people. We have courage and determination. We have grit and tenacity. We have accomplished much in the past 120 years, and yet we still have a long way to go. Even though we see problems that we think someone else should solve, we must remind ourselves that each one of us has the potential to be a part of the solution. Therefore, the purpose of this session was to assemble a panel of good and effective leaders to discuss main issues in leadership from their point of view, describe what it takes to make effective change, and discuss what can be done to develop new leaders, especially for the chiropractic profession.

Panel Discussion

In preparation for the Association of Chiropractic Colleges Educational Conference—Research Agenda Conference (ACCRAC) 2014, we sought speakers who had been influential in various areas of leadership. We considered those with positions of power; those with national and international influence; and those with academic, business, and research backgrounds. The speakers were selected based upon their breadth and depth of experience and being change agents in multiple areas over many years. Much of the change that they have been responsible for has been done without others being aware of their actions, which is one of the signs of a selfless leader. They have sought to make changes for the better: not to improve themselves, but to help others. It is this selfless type of leadership that has set them apart. When invited to speak on leadership, each one responded in a very similar manner: humble and contrite.

It is not often that we have the opportunity to listen to wisdom from 1, let alone 4, outstanding leaders. Therefore, we asked their permission to audiotape the session so that others may gain from this presentation. The following is a transcription of the opening plenary session, “Learning From a Lifetime of Leading Effective Change,” of the ACCRAC 2014. The audio

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