



WISDOM FROM OUR PAST LEADERS

Over the course of the last twelve months, there has been unprecedented change in the leadership of the Departments of Pediatrics across the country. In an effort to capture the wisdom and experience of those Chairs who have moved on, the Leadership Theme Team has compiled the following reflections and advice from alumni of the Pediatric Chairs of Canada. Whether you are new to your role, or you are a Chair with many years of experience under your belt, we hope that these pearls of wisdom resonate with you and inspire your best leadership for years to come!



RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP

- **Obey Sutton's Law.** During the Great Depression Willie "the Actor" Sutton was asked by a reporter, "Why do you rob banks, Mr. Sutton?" to which he said, "That's where the money is." **You need to understand your Department's finances intimately** - where the funds come from and where they go, including compensation packages for all faculty members as well as stipends, contractual arrangements, research accounts and discretionary funds. This will be very important moving forward as well as to determine what resources you have at hand.
- **Follow the money closely.** Have a vision of where you want the department to go and articulate it clearly.
- **Development is important.** Have a very, very good relationship with your Foundation or other fundraisers - Departments of Paediatrics are very dependent on philanthropy for many things, and in some cases, most of their capital equipment.
- **Know the Landscape.** It is crucially important that you understand the political and resource environment of the hospital and university and how to operate within it. Know how far leadership will support you and when they will not, and when they won't find other approaches to solve the problem at hand. Sometimes the indirect approach is necessary to solve a problem that seems best addressed directly - you live in the world you live in, not the one you want to live in.
- **Bribery is counter productive.** There will be some faculty who will always want a little more - money, resources, space. Take such requests seriously but weigh them by their merit. By and large, trying to make some faculty happy by giving them more money for the same work results in a new set of requests for more money.

Collaboration & Culture

- The art is to build bridges - often beyond medicine. Sometimes, it's politics. Sometimes, it's the school. You have to build bridges beyond your comfort zone.
- Be around. You will have many opportunities to travel - resist most of them. You need to be seen at Grand Rounds and meetings in the hospital and university. When you do travel, make sure it is meaningful. For those with regional mandates, travel to your regional centres is one thing that is very meaningful.
- The hospital is not your enemy. There is a tendency for physicians to assume hospital administrators are an evil lot who exist to deny resources to them. This is far from the truth; the vast majority of hospital administrators are good people with good intentions trying to do too much with too little. Work with them - you have a common goal.
- Be genuine and personal with people - take time to be present with them (i.e. no distracted listening!)
- Figure out who your allies are, and who you need to convince to move things forward.
- Listen to diverse viewpoints, not just to the people you like.
- Be deliberate in seeking diversity, unconscious bias is stronger than you think.
- Separate out task vs. personality conflict. Task conflict is good, but make sure it doesn't leak out into personality conflicts.
- Show the flag. It is very important that you are not only invested in the Department and the success of your faculty but that they see that you are. Taking some time every week to walk through the wards, the clinic or the ER to talk to the staff and faculty as well as to children and families - and make sure you talk to the staff. The people who make sure the beds are clean and the floors are washed are important too.
- Have people around you that have skills and perspectives that you may not have.
- Create your own team. You will inherit people in a number of leadership positions, often with term limits and all appointed before you start. For people like divisional leads, it is probably best to keep those in place, unless of course they are in the 14th year of a 10-year term. However, you need to create your own Executive, which may include some of the previous Executive or maybe not. Your Executive should have very clear role descriptions, responsibilities and expectations for example Vice Chair Research, Deputy Chair Clinical Operations, etc. You can have as many or as few as you like but your Executive should cover the waterfront of clinical, education and research. It is important not to only pick people who want to be your friends or people who will always agree with you. Contrary opinions can be important because they are sometimes right. The key is that all members of the Executive need to share your vision for the Department. Mary Kearns in her outstanding book "Team of Rivals" describes Abraham Lincoln's wartime cabinet, which include several of his rivals for President - not picked for that reason but picked because they were superb in their particular domains.
- Truly understand the culture of your organization. Is it the right culture? What elements do you have to change to make things better?
- Communicate, communicate, communicate!

Thank you to the following contributors:

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Leadership

- Be generous with credit to others - be reluctant to take credit yourself.
- Learn the wisdom of knowing when to act decisively and when to let issues percolate - you don't need to have all the answers immediately!
- Transparency is so much more appreciated than one would think.
- If you are approaching a large and difficult task, asking 20 people for their opinion may not lead to a constructive outcome - sometimes it is important to provide individuals with a high-level framework and then allow for a discussion.
- A focus and attention toward professional behaviour and a zero tolerance for individuals who demonstrate unprofessional behaviour goes a long way.
- Strive for excellence by facilitating rather than directing success.

Courage

- Mistakes and failures will happen - be honest and learn from them.
- Be bold in your vision - we can often limit what is possible.
- It can be lonely sometimes at the top - know who you can reach out to for advice and support.
- Don't be afraid to experiment and try new things but articulate clearly to your division what the purpose is, and what you will do if things go wrong.

Vision

- Always make it about the kids and families we serve.
- Try not to get lost in details and forget the overall goal that you set for yourself and the department (easier said than done).

Balance

- Allow faculty members to put family first.
- Don't forget your family, and don't bring your frustrations home!
- Have fun doing the job - the second it ceases to be enjoyable, it's time to reflect if you really want to do the job.



**Pediatric Chairs
of Canada**