

# Are you a good leader?

by A/Prof Lee Kheng Hock, President, 25<sup>th</sup> Council, College of Family Physicians Singapore

Having been an accidental leader of sorts for some years now as the President of the College, I sometimes wonder if I have been a good leader or at least, a good enough leader. The strange thing I realized is that many leaders do not set out in life to become one. You mind your own business and pursue what interest you. Then one day, usually when something goes seriously wrong, you realized that everyone is looking at you for an answer. It is a bit like being in one of those movies where the protagonist wakes up and finds carnage all over and somehow he is in possession of the murder weapon. That is when epiphany dawns upon you and you know that you are the one who must clean up the mess and clear your name at the same time. Well at least that is what the good leader will do. The bad ones just hightail off and blame everyone else.

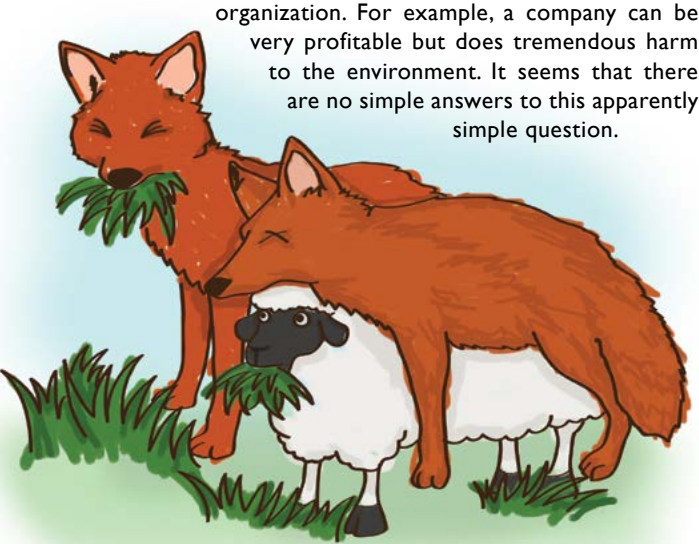
I have tried to learn to be a good leader. There is no shortage of people who hold the secret to good leadership. They are usually not shy about it. Surprisingly, they are quite enthusiastic to share their so-called secret for a sum of money and few days of your time. They are usually as good as those gurus who teach people how to lose weight. I stopped wasting my time and money after I realized that these gurus are usually quite mediocre leaders themselves. I find the best way to learn leadership is to find a good mentor who is great at leadership. Living ones are quite hard to find. Being human they are likely to disappoint you eventually. The best mentors are usually dead and can only be found in books. That way you only see their good side as their flaws are buried with them. One of my dead mentors taught me the best kept secret of leadership. He said that you can resurrect the ghost of dead mentors in your mind to guide you through difficult times. It is not as spooky as it sounds. The hard part is that you must read and imbibe their best moments from the books they write and what others wrote about them. You also need a vivid imagination. Watching lots of horror movies helps.

The other way to be a good leader is to count your sins. According to Lucy Kellaway, my favourite journalist from the Financial Times, there are 7 deadly sins that are common among CEOs (i.e. leaders who make a lot of money). These sinners can be recognized by these traits:<sup>1</sup>

1. Vanity
2. Control freak
3. Ditherers
4. Bad at listening
5. Bullies
6. Afraid of conflict
7. No good at small talk

I was quite pleased when I tallied and discovered that I only have 2 out of the 7. That was until I learned that most of the top CEOs surveyed were sinless. They had perfect scores of zero out of seven. However, these were highly suspect as they were all self-assessments. The journalist who studied these extensive surveys did not believe them as from her unbiased observations most of them were rotten sinners, some with perfect scores on the other extreme. She concluded that the most serious and common sins among CEOs were a lack of self-knowledge and generosity in giving themselves the benefit of the doubt, often at the expense of their subordinates.

What is one to do if you really seek self-knowledge? Jeffrey Pfeffer is an author and business school professor at Stanford University who wrote more than a dozen highly influential books on organizational psychology, management and leadership. When asked for the best measure that indicates a good leader, his answer, as in all wise answer was, "it depends". There are different perspectives of what is "good". A leader can do good for himself or for the organization that he serves. The sobering thing is that what is good for the leader may be bad for the organization and vice versa. A leader can win accolades and/or make lots of money and become a rock star in the world of leadership. However, the organization can remain stagnant or even go down the tubes. If we take an altruistic view, good leaders must do good by the organizations they serve. Then again, there are many dimensions of what is "good" for an organization.



*"Are you sure this vegetarian thing will make me the leader of the pack?"*

Fortunately for a less complicated and altruistic organization like our College, there may be an easier answer. What is good for our organization is enshrined in the objectives of College as stated in our constitution. In gist, it is all about raising the standard of family medicine for the sake of the patients we serve and empowering our members to be the best that they can be. The other easy part is that College leaders don't get paid or receive stock options. So there is little risk of temptation by material gains. In fact most College leaders end up donating time and money to the organization. Instead of counting sins then, it might be better to count virtues. There are 8 virtues that another of my dead mentors came up with. (I wrote about them with regard to professionalism some time ago.)<sup>2</sup> These can be applied to leadership as well. These are:

<b>孝 (xiao) Filial piety</b> Staying faithful to the founding principles of the organisation	<b>悌 (ti) Fraternal piety</b> Duty to your constituents
<b>忠 (zhong) Loyalty</b> Duty to country and the community that your organization serves	<b>信 (xin) Trustworthy</b> Deserving of trust in the interactions with stakeholders

<b>礼 (li) Propriety</b> Appropriate conduct in managing the affairs of the organization	<b>义 (yi) Righteousness</b> Abide by the ethical and moral codes of conduct
<b>廉 (lian) Incorruptible</b> Not swayed by consideration of personal gains and zero tolerance	<b>耻 (chi) Sense of shame</b> Admit to mistakes and remediate any harm done

The world would be a better place if we have virtuous leaders. As for the College, I hope we will continue to be served by council members who strive to attain these virtues. As for myself, I resolve to repent of my sins and seek to accumulate more virtues. Before I leave, one last word from another dead mentor. Beware of false prophets with phoney new visions and who talk a good game. Reject them like the plague. Good College leaders tend to be those who are long suffering and serve quietly for years and even decades. They are neither vain nor populist. They don't just show up during election time. Choose wisely. We need good leaders in the College.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-13974474>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.cfps.org.sg/publications/the-college-mirror/download/57>

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(Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School, NTU Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine and NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine) worked together to organize this event, with generous support from the Joint Committee of Family Medicine Singapore (JCFMS) and the College of Family Physicians Singapore (CFPS). Our concerted effort and hard work paid off in the end, with an impressive turn-up number of 150 medical students and junior doctor participants, who were all eager to find out more about primary healthcare from the Family Medicine veterans themselves.

This year's program comprised keynote talks from experienced Family Medicine physicians, Family Medicine Residency program talks by the three Sponsoring Institutions, as well as an update on the Graduate Diploma in Family Medicine. Participants were awed by the inspiring talks by well-respected Family Medicine doctors who shared their personal experiences interacting with patients of different backgrounds, and enjoyed the rare opportunity to personally interact with them over a sumptuous dinner (topped off with yummy Yami yoghurt)!

In essence, there are three take-home reflections from the Family Medicine Extravaganza 2016.

## Meaningful Sharing and Endless Learning

For many students, the Family Medicine Extravaganza was a good chance to learn more about family practice as a whole. Esteemed speakers such as A/Prof Lee Kheng Hock, A/Prof Chong Phui-Nah, Dr Leong Choon Kit and Dr Low Sher Guan spoke about family practice in various settings – from the hospital, to the polyclinic, to the community. For many students, it was eye opening to learn about how deeply involved family practice is in every aspect of healthcare, and how family practitioners across Singapore contributed in different ways to maintaining the health of our society. The event also allowed students to learn about the more practical aspects of pursuing Family Medicine, such as the various residency programmes available, as well as the Graduate Diploma of Family Medicine. Many of us walked away from the event with a greater appreciation for the importance of Family Medicine.

*Koh Jinkiat, Phase 3 Medical Student,  
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## Working Together Towards a Common Goal

In retrospect, organizing the Family Medicine Extravaganza together with students from all three medical schools was a joy. The biggest takeaway was the realization that there are

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Our emcees, Jinkiat and Lauren calling the randomly-picked winners for the lucky draw events!



Assoc Prof Chen Fun Gee presenting tokens of appreciation to our keynote speakers - A/Prof Lee Kheng Hock (top left), A/Prof Chong Phui-Nah (top right), Dr Leong Choon Kit (bottom left), Dr Low Sher Guan (bottom right)



Dr Loke Kam Weng presenting tokens of appreciation to our Residency programme/GDFM speakers - Dr Darren Seah (top left), A/Prof Tan Boon Yeow (top right), Dr Sally Ho (bottom left), Mr Alvin Chee (bottom right)

All images courtesy of Nicholas Leong, Phase 4 Medical Student, NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine