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Leadership: Character Traits Needed for Healthcare Transformation Part I

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Examiner*
May 15, 2014**

While Kent Keith has not said such to me, it seems obvious that at the root of The Paradoxical Commandments are the virtues of personal passion, trust and hope. It seems that the leadership required for the transformation of healthcare will embrace those commandments and will exhibit the Personal Mastery described by Peter Senge. On August 27, 1998, I wrote SETMA's leadership a note in which I quoted Sir Winston Churchill, who speaking to his Private Secretary, John Colville on August 27, 1940, said, "Each night, I try myself by Court Martial to see if I have done anything effective during the day. I don't mean just pawing the ground; anyone can go through the motions, but something really effective." Successful leadership over a lifetime is made up of successful leadership for one day.

I added to this note the challenge, "Try each day to accomplish something significant and in the end you will succeed in your job. As a leader, you must be true to yourself and not be disappointed with others. You must assist them in becoming all they can be." In that note, I quoted an editorial entitled, 'Leadership Paradoxes,' in which William McCumber, listed ten conclusions about people in general. He found these ideas in a newspaper article about Howard Ferguson, a wrestling coach, who purportedly initially formulated the list. (Read on to find the ten principles and the true source of these remarkable ideas.)

The Origin of The Paradoxical Commandments

Recently, I wanted to use these ideas but was unable to find them. I searched the web and that is when I discovered that the attribution of this work to Ferguson was not correct. This material comes from <http://www.paradoxicalcommandments.com/origin.html>. "The Paradoxical Commandments were written by Kent Keith in 1968, when he was 19 and a sophomore at Harvard College. The commandments were part of *The Silent Revolution: Dynamic Leadership in the Student Council*, his first booklet for high school student leaders. Kent encouraged students to care about others, and to work through the system to achieve change. One thing he learned was students didn't know how to work through the system to bring about change. Some of them also tended to give up quickly when they faced difficulties or failures. They needed deeper, longer-lasting reasons to keep trying.

"In his sophomore year at Harvard, Kent began writing a booklet for high school student leaders that addressed both the how and the why of leading change. The booklet was titled *The Silent Revolution: Dynamic Leadership in the Student Council*, and it was published by Harvard Student Agencies in 1968. The Paradoxical Commandments were part of Chapter Two, entitled 'Brotherly What?'

I wrote Kent and he gave permission to quote his work. The following is the copy of “The Paradoxical Commandments” he sent to me for quotation:

THE PARADOXICAL COMMANDMENTS

By Kent M. Keith

1. People are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered. Love them anyway.
2. If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives. Do good anyway.
3. If you are successful, you will win false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway.
4. The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.
5. Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable. Be honest and frank anyway.
6. The biggest men and women with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest men and women with the smallest minds. Think big anyway.
7. People favor underdogs but follow only top dogs. Fight for a few underdogs anyway.
8. What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway.
9. People really need help but may attack you if you do help them. Help people anyway.
10. Give the world the best you have and you’ll get kicked in the teeth. Give the world the best you have anyway. (© Copyright Kent M. Keith 1968, renewed 2001)

Why Paradoxical Commandments and Healthcare?

While Kent has not said such to me, it seems obvious that at the root of The Paradoxical Commandments are the virtues of personal passion, trust and hope. The kind of leaders who are needed to support and successfully deploy transformative healthcare policies and to achieve challenging goals are those who have what Peter Senge identifies as “personal mastery.” (*The Fifth Discipline*) They are:

1. They have a special sense of purpose that lies behind their vision and goals. For such a person, a vision is a calling rather than simply a good idea.
2. They see current reality as an ally, not an enemy. They have learned how to perceive and work with forces of change rather than resist those forces.
3. They are deeply inquisitive, committed to continually seeing reality more and more accurately.
4. They feel connected to others and to life itself.
5. Yet, they sacrifice none of their uniqueness.
6. They feel as if they are part of a larger creative process, which they can influence but cannot unilaterally control.
7. They live in a continual learning mode.
8. They never ARRIVE!
9. (They) are acutely aware of their ignorance, their incompetence, and their growth areas.
10. And they are deeply self-confident!

Personal Mastery is what leaders require if they are going to persevere through the Paradoxical Commandments. That perseverance is what is required to translate the ideals, principles and policies of national leaders into practical experience in healthcare. These

leaders will possess personal passion, trust and hope.

Commitment to excellence is an individual passion but it becomes a collective, organizational passion as two, then three, then ALL embrace from their heart and soul the same standard. Sustaining excellence is much easier when it is the product of a group's effort. Like the "three- fold cord which is not soon broken," the group sustains the one's commitment to excellence at times of fatigue and discouragement. The physics of the three-fold cord is that at the point of one cord's weakness another is strong and the reciprocal is also true. A cord which can only support 200 pounds, when intertwined with two equally strong cords, can support 2,000 pounds.

So it is with SETMA's efforts for and commitment to excellence. What we cannot do alone, we can do together.