

TRANSCRIPTION: Straight Talk with Mary Ackenhusen: February 2015, True North Forum – Part 2

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What is the biggest takeaway, from today, that you're going to take back to your team?

The importance of open communication.

The importance of the personal connection.

I guess my biggest takeaway is that our leaders are all human, they're all approachable and you can just talk to them and get straight answers from them.

What are your stories about leadership?

Mike Nader: I know when I was a tech early on in my career, I kept seeing decisions that were being made and I kept thinking, "Wow, those guys in those corner offices, man, they're really stupid." That was the word I used in my own mind. (Laughs) But as I progressed through my leadership journey, the one thing I did begin to learn is a lot of the decisions we have to make are really, really hard decisions. It was one thing that I really learned that there's a lot I don't know about in terms of when decisions are being made and how decisions are being made. And where I really benefitted was being able to go talk to those leaders and say, "I don't understand how you made that decision." As soon as I stepped out of director role and I became a COO in Richmond, nobody talked to me anymore. (Laughs) Like, I didn't get the rumours, nobody bitched to me things...it was just like, "He's in the corner office!" As we'll learn today, we're human, we like to talk to people, and so I'd encourage you to talk to us and tell us about the things in your lives and the things that are challenging you. If you think we've made a stupid decision, talk to us about it because there might be things you don't know or there might be things that we don't know that could have influenced that decision.

Dr. Patrick O'Connor: I was trained in anesthesia by an anesthetist who was legally blind. So as uncomfortable as that sounds, he went on to win an Order of Canada for the care he delivered patients. He had a lot of skills that he developed that sighted people never developed. Touch, recognition, you could not get by him in the hallway because he would hear your shuffle or see your shape. So that attention to detail, he brought very, very closely. One of the things he told me early on is there will not always be a right decision – or an agreement on what the right decision is. I'll use an example here. We have pretty good numbers in C. diff., but you know what, they call it the cream of the crop because everybody's bad. Nobody's really good. We had an argument, just a straight argument: what's the best way to clean surfaces? Is it bleach or is it a quaternary compound? I'm on the outside of that argument thinking, in medicine, when people are actually vocally arguing about things, we probably don't know what the answer is. In fact, when we know the answer, the arguments all go away. So there probably is no right answer. In the meantime, as you all know, 20 to 40 patients a year were getting seriously harmed – some of them were dying and we were spending a lot of money. So we started on a different aspect...maybe it isn't the cleaning compound, maybe it's other things we need to talk about like actually cleaning things that were never cleaned before, being smart about how we isolate patients,

empowering the nurses to actually start doing testing and institute treatment without waiting for a team member to come by and do that. And we've had some pretty good success and that's not my success, that's all of your success. Our rates are now very low. That's what ingenuity means and it's in all of us – it doesn't come from the top, it comes from the bottom. So if I've learned anything, it's to make sure you have the best people to do the right job at the right time and that's often the people right on the front line.

Anne Harvey: I learnt most of my leadership skills from my father. He ran a factory with several hundred tradespeople, unionized tradespeople and a sales and a finance team. And he'd bring some of his management problems – challenges – home in the evenings and he'd talk about them at the dinner table. And one of the principles he always kind of drummed into us was when you're delivering particularly bad news you have to be transparent and you have to be authentic about it. He would have called it "telling the truth," that was 50 years ago in a different context, but that's what he was saying – people appreciate you being straightforward even when it's really bad news. I think what I want to say to you is that we all have difficult messages to communicate from time to time and I just want to encourage you to be authentic about that process. I know it's scary, but if you have the courage and work on telling people what you can tell them then I think they will come with you and you can keep them engaged.

Glen Copping: I do want to catch on something that Anne said because interestingly, my father was also running companies that manufactured products and I was also having dinnertime conversations with him my whole life. So I learned a lot from him. Some of the simple things are the most important – it's how you treat other people, do you listen to their ideas, do you collaborate and form partnerships. You're going to go a lot farther if you can gain the knowledge of others and work with people. He also showed me some values that are really important, certainly for the role of a CFO, which is really about integrity and honesty. He would literally make a point of telling me that that company pen he was going to return to the company – he just didn't mess around with that. So those are a couple of the things that I think about. I'm always trying to anticipate problems and another thing I try to do is I try to solve lingering process issues. I do not like firefighting. I like things to just run really well. I can do the firefighting when I have to, but my goal is just make it work and hold people accountable for their responsibility and get clarity around roles and responsibilities in the organization. So that's just a few thoughts, less than a year and half into the job.

What do you think you need to do to become a stronger leader?

Being authentic, being open, being straightforward is the most important.

It made me want to go back and do something really great. My biggest takeaway from today is that there is someone on the other end of our organization. So it is often for us a name and now we're getting a face. And there's humour and they're sharing their personal stories so it makes me feel a bit more connected.