

Tech Talk

Leadership in Biotechnology: Is Anyone Following You?

The following article is based on a panel discussion presented at the ISPE Boston Area Chapter Product Show on October 7, 2009. The article was prepared by moderator Joyce Chiu, Senior Project Manager, Perceptive Informatics, PAREXEL International, in collaboration with the panelists:

- Walt Bassett - Director, R&D, Bioprocess Technology, Pre-development and Core Research, Millipore Corporation
- Joe Maressa - Vice President, Fitzgerald, Stevens and Ford Inc./OI Partners
- Beth Wescott - Director, Site Operations Management, Pfizer
- Joyce Whitehead, PhD - Director, Manufacturing Technical Services, Shire Human Genetic Therapies
- Lesley Wood - Director of Manufacturing, Lonza Biologics

Five main aspects of leadership were examined during the panel discussion, each phrased as a question. The article explores each of these questions and highlights the individual experiences and insights shared by the panelists during the live session. As there was no handout, the moderator and panelists intend for the article and accompanying reference list to serve the purpose of knowledge-sharing from the session, reaching beyond the immediate audience in the room to all Chapter Members.

Leadership: What Is It & Why Is It Important?

Joe Maressa opened the floor and shared the distinction between managers and leaders. Leaders make decisions on destination, the course, the reason for an organization's existence and understand all stakeholders, including society, and how they benefit from the organization's endeavor. A leader crystallizes and communicates a vision, creates a new one when the original is no longer valid, and creates the compelling need for change. A leader asks questions, whereas a manager answers them. A leader provides the "what" and "why," whereas a manager provides the "how."

This reminds us of the fable of the medieval traveler who happened upon a construction site and saw workers laying bricks. He asked the first worker, "What are you doing?" and got the answer, "I am laying bricks." He asked a second worker and got the answer, "I am building a wall." Finally he came upon a third worker and asked again, and got the answer, "I am building a cathedral!"

Leaders build strong teams and develop future leaders. They are strategic thinkers, not just strategic planners. They create a compelling vision that unleashes the creativity and innovation in their people, making the impossible possible. Leaders also embrace conflicts as opportunities to build strong relationships and foster innovation.

Leaders also know themselves well, their strengths and weaknesses. They then build and use a team so that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Leaders are people who consistently strive for maximum impact. They understand that peak performance comes from peak energy. They not only have career goals but physical and emotional health, spiritual and ethical, and often family and community goals as well. Managers implement ethics, leaders live it.

Table I is a model that Joe has developed over the last 35 years highlighting the differences between a manager, leader, and enlightened leader.

Table I – Manager to Enlightened Leader: <i>Major Differences</i> The Growth to Great Leadership		
Manager	Leader	Enlightened Leader
• Focuses on Here and Now	• Creates Vision	• Creates New Vision
• Implements Change	• Drives Change	• Creates Change
• Works Within Culture	• Reinforces Culture	• Shapes Culture
• Manages	• Leads	• Creates a Leadership Footprint
• Tactician	• Strategic Planner	• Strategic Thinker
• Command – Control	• Aligns	• Unleashes Creativity and Innovation
• Decides How	• Decides Why	• Decides What
• Debates	• Discusses	• Dialogues
• Avoids or Suppresses Conflict	• Resolves	• Embraces
• Knows Others	• Knows Themselves	• Believes in Others and Themselves
• Overuses Strengths	• Uses Team Strengths	• Develops Team and Self Physically, Emotionally, Spiritually, Ethically
• Work Focus	• Organization Focus	• Life Focus
• Emotionally Hijacked	• Aware of Emotions	• Emotionally Intelligent

- Implement Ethics Policy

- Sets Policy

- Lives It

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Joyce Whitehead offered that leading people rarely means dragging them with you to a specific destination or goal, but rather, is more like “herding cats.” Diverse opinions are listened to with respect, so that the team can reach a collaborative alignment on the outcome, goal or risk. Thus leadership is the ability to get people with disparate backgrounds, experience and ideas to align behind a common goal. In the biotech business, we often need to make quick collaborative decisions on a daily basis, often with the patients in mind. Leadership is thus essential to guide, align and focus the team in getting results.

The analogy of herding cats resonated with Beth Westcott, especially in a matrix organization where there is not a clear mandate or reporting structure. Nothing in this industry can be done independently, and people do have choices. Persuading others to follow begins with trust, integrity and willingness to support the team. In her interactions, Beth has found that people are waiting for someone to have the courage to step forward and articulate a clear business case to remove barriers. As a leader proves their willingness to support the team, the team will continue to step up to greater challenges. In the biotech industry, there are a lot of bright people, thus integrity and trust are key to building lasting relationships.

Lesley Wood emphasized having passion -- creating a culture which has a clear sense of purpose and is passionate about what it does. Leaders need to create a sense of urgency without chaos, fostering an environment where new ideas are the norm and are listened to. On the personal side, she noted it is very important to have a work life balance, as a mother of two teenage children well understands.

As a leader in a large R&D organization who is not the subject matter expert, Walt Bassett believes in motivating and encouraging others to do their best, to collectively inspire teams to work cross-functionally to achieve results, surpassing the mere sum of the individuals. A leader needs to energize, excite and empower the team.

Leadership Styles: An Exploration

Research has shown that leadership is primarily emotional intelligence and skills; effective leaders employ different styles in different situations. There are some who provide a vision, others who build relationships, solicit input to build consensus or alignment, coach and mentor to develop others, demand excellence or even immediate compliance.¹ The panelists explored their own styles and how they used them in different situations.

Joyce is not a visionary but she has the ability to quickly develop relationships with people and influence them through these relationships, which serve as a foundation to allow other leadership styles to work, such as building consensus within teams and coaching others for high performance. She is a firm believer in leading by example. As salaried employees, her teams are not “paid by the hour then go home” but rather they are

¹ *Leadership That Gets Results*, Daniel Goleman, HBR, March-April, 2000 (the six styles of leadership)

paid to get a job done, no matter how long it takes. Joyce lives by that principle herself, putting in the hours needed to ensure the success of her company and the well being of its patients.

Leadership style also changes with the audience. With direct reports, Joyce rarely demands immediate compliance but if she does, it means she is very serious or passionate about the issue. With peers and cross-functional teams, it is all about building collaboration and trust. Getting teams to agree to a common goal may be hard and, on occasion, a leader may need to “trump” certain members to reach a decision; it is important to remember that at that point, the entire team needs to buy into the decision and accept the risk and reward that come with it.

Walt worked at General Electric early in his career. He has long admired the leadership style of Jack Welch during his rise to GE President and CEO. Welch transformed a huge company into a group of individual businesses that had enough autonomy to excel in each of their specific market segments. Welch removed layers from the hierarchy and empowered teams to act quickly and own their ideas and their business.

Walt also likes to adopt a style exemplified by successful sports coaches, or the conductor of a symphony orchestra. In either case, the leader is a true student of the game, but not necessarily an expert in any particular area, who can rally diverse individual talents into a single-minded effort to generate success. A symphony conductor may not be the consummate player of any instrument, but they know what great music should sound like when all the instruments play in harmony.

Lesley’s only true style is to be authentic. After that, it is important to create overall goals and, through listening and coaching, keep everyone focused on achieving those goals. When there is chaos, people cannot function. It is important to get the team aligned behind common goals for collaboration. Try to achieve some quick wins, so that the team is confident to go on. Divide and conquer – define a place for everyone immediately, not looking out 10 years. Create some order out of the chaos. The orchestra analogy is really excellent. After the team achieves some initial success, give credit and recognition.

Joe does not lead in the traditional sense but coaches people to lead themselves and others. He uses different approaches or styles when engaged with them. When coaching a leader or trying to convince someone of the benefits of leadership development, Joe establishes a foundation of trust and mutual respect. He clarifies what the individual wants as an outcome and the kind of relationship they desire. Next is to get an agreement on the development process and the steps with which to achieve the outcome. How this is achieved depends on many factors, including the level of trust, the extent of agreement on the goals and the temperament, values, life and world view, personality, learning style, etc. of the individual(s) involved.

Joe pointed out that the biggest problem with leaders is that very few are willing to tell a leader their weaknesses. Therefore, knowing their “blind spots” is important for leaders,

especially how their leadership style hurts their effectiveness. Leaders would be fortunate to have a spouse or a close friend or associate who would be willing to share this insight with them.

Core Values for Tough Challenges

As they face tough challenges where there are no clear guidelines, what values do these leaders rely on for guidance?

Beth's first principle would be to walk the talk, resonating with what Lesley said about being authentic. Beth used the example of being asked to facilitate a meeting for a project. The intent was to utilize her exposure to construction and project management to create alignment on the project. Beth was unknown to the site and the team, yet within a few days of her arrival, someone on the team managed to reconstruct her entire resume. When questioned, the team member said he merely asked people about Beth as he made calls over the previous two days.

The lesson learned? Beth grew up in a small town where everyone knew your business - it doesn't hurt to treat this industry the same way. Beth found this insight served her well when she started her second career. The other value that has served Beth well is to assume the best of people and their intentions. It is the strongest place to begin relationships and brings one through tough situations. Everyone wants to perform and contribute; having a clear agreement on the goals and the path is the best way to give them the opportunity.

Joe believes an individual's values are major determinants of their leadership style, whereas leadership styles or models, when taken alone, are superficial. The three values that have served Joe well include: the dignity of every individual, conflict management and a strong desire to solve complex people issues, and to make a difference in the lives of individuals and companies.

Dignity of every individual: Joe shared a story of integrating a manufacturing plant in South Boston which had 160 employees, all white and male, predominantly Irish. By understanding fears (with a bomb threat to his office) and anticipation of problems and strong relationships and stakeholders, Joe played a critical role and eventually the first African American, then the first woman, was hired.

Conflict is both necessary and part of work life. In most cases, it is an opportunity to create innovative solutions and build relationships. Joe was involved in a situation where there was a very poor relationship between the CEO of a startup company and its board of directors and demanding investors. Through a series of interviews with all involved, people saw things from a different perspective and relationships were significantly improved, and the company received additional funding.

Joe was raised in an extended Italian American household. His father, an immigrant, instilled in him the value that America gave everyone the opportunity to develop

themselves and to succeed, and with that comes responsibility. Life is short; work life is even shorter. It behooves all of us to make the highest contribution possible for ourselves, our families, our companies and society.

Taking a different direction, Joyce said that one of the challenges in leading people is delivering the hard news – messages around performance and during layoffs. As leaders, we are obligated to our direct reports and to our company, to be timely, honest and direct during these situations.

Walt cited honesty, integrity and truth to be his values. Two early lessons came when he first stepped into management. First, being bossy only works for a short time. He was all about telling everybody what to do and when to do it. Walt had to learn to relax and let people do their jobs and just provide direction when needed. Many first-time supervisors fall into this trap. If it continues, it shows a lack of maturity or a sign of insecurity.

Early in Walt's career, he observed a business unit manager arrive whose whole approach revolved around asking questions. He was able to get to the heart of every issue by asking good, probing questions. This stuck with Walt, especially when he is asked to lead an area where he is not the expert.

Walt shared an experience where a regulatory body came into a plant for an inspection. An old-timer had a stash of samples which he provided instead of what was produced on the floor. Apparently, this had been condoned for many years and everyone turned a blind eye. Walt stopped the practice. In business, the golden rule is honesty, integrity and truth. If we cannot live with certain practices and cannot change them, then the only option is to leave.

Changes in the Biotech Industry

There are many changes occurring in the biotech industry. What are some of the changes faced by our panelists and how are they dealing with them?

Given the economic downturn, Joe commented that it is a challenge to win people over to investing in leadership development. Trust and relationship building, and making the case that improved leadership makes a difference in how the company deals with the downturn and its future, are his approach. Such an investment is a major retention factor and once the economy turns, people will be more apt to stay because of the company's investment during hard times.

To Walt, dealing with change is exciting; however, some people are less able to deal with ambiguity. Change gets intelligent people thinking what's in it for them. The most common tasks within R&D are decisions on which projects to work and what resources to apply. Leadership needs to listen, primarily to the customer, and interpret the proper direction. Decisions are best when made with the input of strong technical talent, combined with a solid understanding of the core business strength of the company.

Joyce continued the thread with the growing pains of a development (R&D) organization being transformed into a commercial one. As a development organization, there is no real obligation to adhere to the strict cGMPs set forth by the regulatory authorities, whereas a commercial organization is bound to. Thus a change in culture is necessary, where accurate SOPs and “doing it right the first time” are important. The biotech industry is also changing to new technologies with shorter cycle times; thus technical people in the industry need to adapt and embrace these changes. Working with people to bring about a new culture is a great leadership challenge.

Lesley is faced with the change of moving from engineering to operations – getting the production demand schedule and listening to people about these schedules and figuring out what makes sense. Building a new team that is realistic, feels empowered and responsible by constant coaching ... the list of challenges is endless!

The other big change is: we no longer need to build big new plants, which has been the primary goal for most engineers’ careers in biotech for the last 20 years. We are building fewer plants and the plants we have are maturing, being modified for new products, thus becoming more like the rest of the chemical and pharmaceutical industry. If we don’t engage our engineers soon, we will lose them to another new exciting industry (sustainable energy perhaps?).

How can we get our engineers excited about new projects? These projects may sound lackluster until we put measures like dollars saved against them. At Lonza, these come under Operational Excellence - which ranks second only to customer needs - making our plants more efficient, easier to operate, reducing energy consumption, etc.

Leadership Challenges in Biotech and Skills for Navigation

According to Lesley, the unique challenges are much fewer than they were ten years ago. The biggest is the maturing of the industry. Efficiency is at least as important as science now, which requires a different mindset to get it right. Today, new improvement ideas more often come from logistics or finance, rather than R&D. We need to learn from other industries, focus on operational excellence, and show our commitment and be thoughtful about it. She recently toured a Boeing plant - an exciting opportunity. However, the real take-away lesson for her? While a jet plane is being assembled, the operator on the floor doing the assembly is the most important person in the company; *everyone* supports them.

In Walt’s view, the biotech industry is in transition. While there are still plenty of startups and small entrepreneurial companies, the maturing businesses are adjusting to the fact that earnings, shareholder value and Wall Street performance are becoming important for sustainability. Big Biotech will need to look more closely at what other industries have been doing for years. Namely, quality, cost and efficiency will become more evident as pure research is de-emphasized.

Beth concurred that the biotech industry must deal with the cost question if it is to remain prosperous: “At the Andover site, our strengths have been high quality products delivered when our patients needed them. Our weakness has been the price the patients have had to pay. Asking a family to support costs on the order of \$40,000 a year is not acceptable and we are seeing the impact of these costs in restricted access across the globe. What if our cost structure could be low enough to support broadened access to our patients?”

She continued, “We have begun tackling the inflexibility and variability in our systems, building capabilities to support a more flexible and agile manufacturing model. The engagement of our people has been astonishing, yielding surprising (and sometimes embarrassing) opportunities. Changing our culture so that visibility of barriers and problems is expected and rewarded opens the door to change. Empowering our people at all levels to make these changes will be the catalyst to make it all happen.”

Given the fact that patent protection will no longer exist for many drugs, Joe added, leaders will have to make the right decisions. Leaders will have to think about strategic alliances in order to have the money necessary to develop the next generation of drugs. Leaders at all levels will have to encourage and develop more creative thinking and innovative ways of developing drugs, building high performance work systems and employment engagement, and integrating people, systems, organizational structures, and business processes and practices to maximize the talents and experience of all stakeholders.

The three key elements are: a shared focus on the results to be achieved, a strong sense of each individual’s purpose and role and how that impacts others, and transparent measurements in terms of progress. High-energy, high-powered teams, with shared goals and transparent metrics, will increase the capability of individuals as well as the entire team.

Acknowledgement & Feedback

The author thanks the panelists for their collaboration on the program design and for sharing their valuable experience and insight. In working together as a team, they exemplified what they preached. If anyone has any feedback on either the live session presented at the Product Show or this article, or suggestions for future topics, please send them to ISPE@camihq.com

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