

Nurturing Future Leaders Is the Path to Progress

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Every year since he started a little computer company in his parents' garage, Bill Gates has escaped to [Washington's Hood Canal](#) to focus on ushering in a future that surpasses the present. That's what chiropractic's leaders need to do. We owe the very survival of our profession to the often charismatic and highly persuasive leaders of our past. But the future demands something different. We need leaders today who possess not only top professional skills, but also the business acumen and communication competencies to effectively participate in national conversations about health care reform and share chiropractic's unique vision.

Our colleges are the most logical incubators for future leaders, and these institutions must take on this responsibility in a highly intentional way. Our professional associations must also keep the ball rolling in working with new practitioners. The unique identity of our profession depends on this generation of chiropractors being equipped and willing to create and share a larger vision.

[Warren Bennis](#) says leadership can be learned by anyone, taught to everyone and denied to no one. Our chiropractic colleges and professional associations must understand and act on the concept that although not everyone in the profession will sit at the helm of our largest organizations, every chiropractor must lead the profession in some aspect and do so with integrity and professionalism.

Our colleges must start the work with students and our professional associations and consulting firms continue the effort with new practitioners. We are creating a culture at Life University that supports all students in developing a compelling vision for a better world and exploring their roles in bringing that vision to fruition. We believe their vision and commitment will bubble up from a process of self-discovery and challenge initiated by thought-provoking mentors and educational experiences.

Interwoven in every Life student's curriculum is an in-depth exploration of integrity, citizenship, leadership and entrepreneurship. Integrity provides the underpinning for the responsible exercise of our rights and responsibilities and leads to empowerment and excellence. Leadership involves developing and articulating a personal vision for improvement and learning how to engage others in support of that vision. Because we want future DCs to develop skills of positive influence, we draw on an extensive body of knowledge in the fields of invitational, ethical and what has been called "servant" leadership to construct the most effective learning experiences. Our associations and other mentoring programs can also draw on these disciplines.

Invitational Leadership

Invitational leadership asserts that every person and thing in and around an organization adds to, or subtracts from, people's lives. Invitational leadership ideally sees people, places, policies, programs and processes developed in ways that encourage others to develop intellectually, socially, physically, psychologically and spiritually.

In their book *Invitational Leadership: A Way to Balance Our Lives*, Betty Siegel, PhD, president emeritus of Kennesaw State University, and William Purkey define invitational leadership as: "A generous and genuine turning toward others in empathy and respect, with the ultimate goal of collaborating with them on projects of mutual benefit." Invitational leaders know their success depends on other people and look for ways to help others reach their potential.

Ethical Leadership

Few things provide for sound mental health more than knowing your choices are ethically based and in harmony with your values. Leaders not only have a responsibility to behave ethically, of course, but also the opportunity and responsibility to influence, encourage and facilitate ethical behavior in others. In his book *Do the Right Thing: Living Ethically in an Unethical World*, Thomas Plant, PhD, psychologist and ethicist at Stanford University, describes a system of ethical processing in which integrity, competence, responsibility, respect and concern provide the rationale anyone can use to do the right thing.

Repeatedly, the study of ethical leadership shows integrity and leadership go hand in hand and that the long-term success of an organization depends not only on technical competence, but also a solid grounding in ethical values. In the real world, tensions often exist between personal values and goals, and organizational and community goals. Ethical leadership involves recognizing and reconciling those tensions with an eye toward the greater good.

Servant Leadership

Leadership provides an opportunity to be of service to others and to be worthy of their trust. First introduced by Robert K. Greenleaf in a 1970 essay titled "[The Servant as Leader](#)," the concept of servant leadership has grown into a highly successful modern movement. Servant leaders seek to nurture the abilities of people to look at an organization or a problem from a conceptual perspective, appreciating, but thinking beyond, day-to-day realities. They use their roles for the greater good of society and are committed to the personal, professional and spiritual growth of all members.

If the goal of our colleges and professional associations were simply to inform chiropractors about leadership, conventional instruction would work. However, to nurture an individual's capacity to participate more wholeheartedly, more willingly and more effectively in leadership roles, you need something different. At Life, we do this by providing highly motivated students a living laboratory for nurturing leadership skills.

Through Life University's Leadership Institute, we direct the most energetic, capable and inspired students to explore their inherent gifts of leadership and develop their capacity to serve as agents of change. *We make leadership tangible as we enhance student understanding of personality styles, integrity, management skills, communication strategies and emotional intelligence.*

Specifically, select students participate in retreats featuring significant interaction with myself and senior staff, in-depth exploration of leadership topics and interactive work sessions. Students also travel to Washington, D.C., to learn how to interact with legislators and impact the political system. Leadership scholars complete community service projects of their design to extend their impact to real-world efforts while capitalizing on their growing professional skills.

This type of leadership program could be adapted by our state and national associations to build the

skills of outstanding young chiropractors who show promise and a desire to lead our profession. Mentoring partnerships could be established between current and future leaders.

In studying more than 90 leaders of national and multinational organizations, Bennis found that the most successful tend to have an almost unlimited capacity to learn new behavior. Emerging leaders in our profession must also adopt new behaviors to direct and protect the advancement of chiropractic and effectively shape our nation's health care system. Our colleges and professional associations must nurture leadership skills with the same passion we bring to advancing technique skills. In that way, we'll ensure a strong vision for the profession in an ever more complicated environment.

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