

Margaret Kripke, PhD talks about The Leadership Experience

Dr. Kripke came to MD Anderson in 1983 as founding chair of the Department of Immunology. She served as Executive VP and Chief Academic Officer from 2001 until her retirement in 2007. In an interview conducted in 2014, she talks about the experience of stepping into an executive leadership role and shares some of her most important leadership principles.



Taking on Executive Leadership

Once you move into that level of administration it's like the white water rafting analogy. You get in, and you start paddling because you can't do anything else. You have no time to think about what it is that you're doing, and so it's extremely important to lead from principles because it forces consistency. It enables transparency, and it gives you guideposts for decision making.

One of [the principles] was a mandate from Dr. Mendelsohn, and that is to support excellence. If you have a choice to make, and you have to decide who gets resources, you support excellence.

One of my favorite principles is to reward the behavior that you want. I really tried to stick with that. It's easy to do things for people who are pounding on your desk, and screaming, and being the loudest. I always tried not to reward bad behavior and to make part of the institutional awards include an element of being a role model in the institution. So reward the behavior that you want is an important one of mine.

Another principle is to always tell the truth. It's amazing how many people don't do that. Always tell the same story. I know people in leadership positions that will say one thing in one context and say something somewhat different depending on who the audience is. That never works. It's a disaster. Some people never take responsibility for decisions and for actions. You should always be ready to stand up and take responsibility for what it is that you're doing.

It's amazing how often those are not followed. I have seen previous leaders who were very secretive about who got resources and how things worked, I suppose as a protective mechanism.

This interview clip was taken from an in-depth interview conducted for the Making Cancer History Voices Oral History Project. This ongoing project currently contains almost 400 interview hours with MD Anderson institution builders.

The transcript has been edited from the original.

The content is available for all uses.

To explore the full interview go to: <http://mdanderson.libguides.com/KripkeM>

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