

Raphael Pollock, MD, PhD, tells a story about Leading Self

Dr. Pollock served as Chair of the Dept. of Surgical Oncology from 1994-2010 and Head of the Division of Surgery from 1997-2012. In an interview conducted in 2012 he shared his philosophy of leadership and the importance of human interaction to leadership effectiveness.



Listening and Servant Leadership

St. Francis says, “Seek ye to listen rather than to be listened to,” which I think is the most powerful leadership precept of anything that I’ve ever read. As soon as you are seeking to listen, you’re opening yourself up to empathy—empathizing with someone else. Can you put yourself in their shoes? Can you look through their eyes and see what the horizon looks like? Can you remember back to when you were a first-year assistant professor and it looked like there were these giants walking the earth who could crush you with a single step? Can you think about how terrified you were about taking on new things that you didn’t know how to do yet with mentorship available? Can you think about that? Are you able to still recreate that in your mind? As soon as you make the commitment to listening, you open yourself up to empathy and you open your mind up to someone else. If you’re going to be a leader, particularly if you’re going to practice servant leadership, you have to think about this from the perspective of what does someone else want to accomplish. And that includes people who may not have as much insight or experience or native talent or whatever.

So I think that listening is really where this all comes from, and being patient. Letting someone struggle to express their idea rather than just imposing your idea if they can’t get the idea out quick enough is really important, because that ultimately builds trust. You become reliable, and that’s what so many people are looking for in this day and age. What they so often don’t find is reliability, empathy, the willingness to listen, the willingness to think about someone else’s issue selflessly.

About This Content

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/PollockR>

About the speaker:

Raphael Pollock, MD (left MDA 2013)

Interviewed: 2012

Primary app't: Department of Surgical Oncology.

Research: surgical techniques, surgical stress, natural killer cells, molecular approaches to soft tissue sarcoma; angiogenesis, chemoresistance, novel therapeutics

Admin: Chair, Department of Surgical Oncology (1994 – 2010); Head, Division of Surgery (1997 – 2012).

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