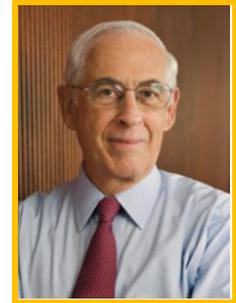


John Mendelsohn, MD, tells a story about Strategic Planning

John Mendelsohn served as MD Anderson's third president from 1996–2011. In an interview conducted in 2012, he explains why the decision was made not to establish a major prevention program, despite the fact that prevention is one of the institution's mission areas. The terminology in the sidebar is taken from *Play to Win* by A.G. Lafley and Roger L. Martin, and is intended to stimulate discussion of their strategic planning model.



Obstacles to Establishing a Major Prevention Program

My predecessor, Dr. LeMaistre, always wanted to bring prevention into our mission and we built a prevention program, which became very strong academically and moderately effective in having an impact clinically. If we're going to have a major impact on prevention beyond studying it and learning how to do it, and impact the many of thousands of people that need to be screened in order to carry out prevention, we have to develop the model to do it. Frankly, there are so many things pulling on the resources that that has not moved into the top priority.

I think the main challenge, and it's a very difficult challenge, is most people that come to MD Anderson as patients have a sign on them, "I've got cancer." The people who come to our prevention clinic are usually people that are well. Building a program where people who are healthy and want to avoid cancer are coming to a cancer center, is a challenge. We thought of putting up a prevention clinic out near the Galleria, away from all of our patients with cancer.

If we had a spectacular prevention program --we talked about having an executive program. People fly to the Mayo Clinic to get a complete workup. Well if you're going to do the complete work up you have cardiology and diabetes and all kinds of other things covered with world-class experts. We're not set up that way. Our world-class experts are in cancer. And to ask someone to come and do a complete work up just for cancer, it's complicated. It needs some attention if we're going to do it right. If we don't do it right, we don't want to do it.

Wisely, people here are really focused on what we're really good at. If you go to the airport, you can buy these books on how to be a great executive. One piece of advice came from Jack Welch: Be number one or two at something or don't do it. I think that's part of the feeling here. If we do it, we want to be number one or two. But the setup of a major prevention screening program that would be one or two would be a very major undertaking.

Strategic Problem

Winning Aspiration

Where will we play?

How will we win?

What capabilities must be in place?

What management systems are required?

*****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 500 interview hours with MD Anderson institution builders.

The transcript has been edited from the original.
The content is available for public use.

Interview link: <https://mdanderson.libguides.com/MendelsohnM>

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Interview Subject's name, Date of Session, Historical Resources Center, Research Medical Library, The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center.

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