

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 talks about a lesson he learned about exerting his leadership authority in a productive way.



Learning to Exert Authority

I learned how to accomplish some goals without having to have them quite so much of a zero-sum proposition, where someone had to lose for someone else to win. Inherently, that's who I was, but executing on that at times I found difficult.

There were two faculty members in the department who were both working in the same disease site and were very critical of each other. What ended up happening was they would make rounds on all of the patients that had the specific type of disease, including the patients of the other person, and then, in front of the fellows, they would criticize the management, which was very destructive. The way that I handled that—this was one of the early tasks—the way that I handled that was I pulled them both in my office and said, “This is going to stop immediately or else there will be repercussions. These are the tools that are at my beck and call—your salary, your tenure, your employment. What about that don't you understand?” And they both left.

Now, it accomplished the purpose, but I think in some ways it was very alienating for them to have been on the receiving end of that. I think it would have been much more constructive to have spoken to them individually and demonstrated how destructive their actions were and how much consternation it was causing the trainees who felt like they had to pick sides in this process and how unfair it was to them and detrimental to their education and that I really had higher expectations because I knew that they could do better. Yeah, I was going to have to monitor it now that this had come forward, but please let's make this the last time that we have to talk about this. Now, that has a very different feel.

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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