

Marshall Hicks, MD, tells a story about Executive Leadership and Leading Peers

Dr. Hicks joined the faculty of in the Department of Diagnostic Radiology in 1998. He served as department chair from 2007-2012 and as President ad interim from 2016-2017. In an interview conducted in 2019, he talks about a key lesson he learned as he rose to executive leadership.



Avoiding a Pitfall of Executive Leadership

There's a perspective when you are at an executive level position, that you have an ability to see solutions that no one else can see and that this is the right thing to do, instead of listening to those that are really at the frontline or really dealing with some of the issues, who know the problems well and can come up with solutions. People at that level want to fix things. It's a pitfall of leadership frankly, that's easy to get into if you aren't willing to listen and aren't willing to hear what's going on out in the organization.

Inherent in that is the trust that you have to have: people that are reporting to you are telling you the truth about what's really going on out in the organization, and empowering them to come up with solutions. No question, it's a style thing, too. Some people are more inclined to micromanage and some are more willing to delegate. To me it's one of the differentiators in evolved leadership: the ability to delegate appropriately and to trust and empower. It certainly not only develops leaders, and empowers leaders, and creates that engagement that has a positive influence on morale, but it also allows you, as a leader, to be much more effective broadly. Because if you micromanage or get too narrow into what you're trying to accomplish in a particular area, you don't have the bandwidth to be able to manage more broadly so you're leveraging all the talent, the brilliance of the organization that's already there, to get more done and to be able to be more effective. I think there's a temptation when you don't have all the answers or all the expertise, sometimes people don't want to admit it or show it, and people can dig into what they think may be the right answer and ignore help sometimes too. It's complicated just because it's people.

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.

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Interview link: <http://mdanderson.libguides.com/HicksME>

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