

Donna K. Sollenberger tells a story about Leading the Institution and Leaders

Donna Sollenberger served as MD Anderson's VP of Hospitals and Clinics from 1994-1997. She currently serves as Executive Vice President and CEO of University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston. In an interview conducted in 2013, she tells this story about how she handled a decision to close a program at UTMB.



Institutional Decisions and Personal Interactions

We had to do something here recently where we were closing a program. They're all really good people. I don't want to lose them to our organization, and there are positions that they're qualified for if they desire to do that. So I met with them. I said, "I know that this has been very difficult on everybody, especially you, because this has personally affected you. I want you to know that we support you. We want to try to make sure if you want to stay and work here that we can provide that opportunity. We're going to have you matched up to open positions that are available, and HR can work with you on what those will be." Then to the rest of this group, assuring them --because in this instance that there are no plans to eliminate the rest of the program—that, "We appreciate the work they do. We know it's hard when you watch colleagues, people you've worked with, through no fault of their own have a position go away, but that we're going to try to get these people placed if they still wish to work here, and all of them do, actually. What questions do you have from us?"

This has just been within the last month, so it's fresh. I had one of the nurses say, "It's really hard, because I'm angry right now." I said, "Completely understandable." It's all different depending on what the situation is and what your organization is, but I think that opportunity to show people—yes, you made the decision, but that doesn't mean that you're going to go into hiding. You also understand that they have feelings. They have needs. They have questions and they don't want to hear it filtered through eighteen other people. They want to hear it directly from you. We, as leaders, when we made these significant changes on part of our organization need to take accountability for it and also listen to the concerns of the employees who are still there and what they're worried about. So I think it's important to really understand what they're thinking and to create an environment where they feel safe telling you that.

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: <https://mdanderson.libguides.com/SollenbergerD>

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