

Donna K. Sollenberger tells a story about Leading Self

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 a leadership lesson she learned from MD Anderson's second president, Charles A. LeMaistre, MD.



Knowing People Is a Leadership Essential

That was one of the great lessons I've learned from Dr. LeMaistre. I remember being in an elevator. It was a Friday afternoon, I think, and he liked me to come get him every so often, and we'd do rounds in the hospital or in the food service or in the clinic and interact with the employees and give them an opportunity, if they had anything on their mind, to express it. I remember he didn't just know who somebody was. He knew their family and that they had a kid in college. He knew so much about our employees. I was absolutely astonished at how much he knew and how personal—employees felt they knew him. It was a personal interaction. It wasn't just the president walking through. I remember saying to him, "Gosh, how can you know all of that?" He looked at me and said, "How can you not?" I said, "Well, I'm not sure I understand." He said, "If you're going to be a leader, it's easy to lead when times are good. People will follow you." But he said, "When times get tough and you have to make tough decisions, they need to know you. They need to know that you probably agonized over this decision and that this was a difficult decision, but they trust you, and they will still follow you to go into potentially places where it's uncertain." I remember thinking, "Wow!" (laughs) I mean, it was just a great teaching moment for a young executive—a person who had been in her job a few months at that level—to have someone who really taught you the importance of really knowing the people you're leading and having them know you.

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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