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| Michael: | I’m Mike Johns. Some people call me Michael. Some people call me Mike. I like to say my friends, my good friends call me Mikey. I try to stop that now, but my friends call me Mike. My acquaintances call me Michael. Everybody else can call me Dean Johns or Vice President Johns. Your choice. I like that approach because it has a little humor to it right from the beginning and tells people, you want to be my friend, call me Mike. |
|  | Generally that is a good starting point in life is getting people to call you Mike and start out working on their level no matter who they are, whether it’s the housekeeper or the president of the university, the chief of surgery, whatever. I think it’s setting a playing field that’s pretty level. We’re all people we’re all humans and we all contribute in some way. That’s a reflection somewhat of growing up in the way I grew up and the circumstances within which I grew up. |
|  | I might start with that kind of a statement and then say from there life is all about experiences and mentors, I think, people that you have respect for who give you guidance and advice over time and over years. People talk about you have to have a mentor. No, you have to have mentors and they change over time in life. I would say when I look back, my first obvious mentors were my mom and my dad. I grew up in Detroit and in the city, and I mean in the city. They were working class people. Dad was the janitor and maintenance man at the Catholic Church which was nearby, and Mom was the home keeper. Five kids. You learn how to survive when there are five of you. I was the oldest. The rules always would be when your brother, Fred, is old enough then you can do that. I kept saying that doesn’t make any sense because obviously he’s going to be younger than me all the time. That was it. |
|  | There were rules in our family. That was probably one of the earliest lessons I learned is that there are rules and you’ve got to live by the rules or else there are consequences. Back in those days there were consequences that stung a little bit but not bad. We learned how to follow rules. Mom had rules like when you come home from school, you hit the books, get your homework done first and then you can go out and play. I always lived that. You do your homework before you play, whatever homework means to you at your stage of life. You get the work done and then you go out and play. Play is part of life. It’s an important part of the combination of work and play. You need to have both. |
|  | Having rules as a child growing up, there’s another lesson from rules when Dad has rules, is that, you know what, we found there were work-arounds. Particularly with five kids, we could figure out work-arounds. I don’t mean to say we broke the law. People makes rules. They’re not perfect. Sometimes the rules get in the way of progress and you have to figure out how do you get around that without getting into a lot of trouble. |
|  | I think about that sometimes over the years of my career is that you need to have work-arounds. You need to find solutions basically, too, to problems. That’s one part of, I think, being successful as a leader is you’ve got to like problems. If you don’t like problems, don’t even bother. That’s all you get when you’re a leader, whatever it is, whatever level, people bring you a problem and you’re supposed to fix it or solve it. That’s something that I learned early in life, rules, work-arounds and problems need to be fixed. |
|  | The other was hard work. That’s a lesson I got from my mother early on was, as she would say, “Hard work don’t kill no one.” We all had jobs early on whether it was doing newspapers as soon as you could get a newspaper route. She would come home and say, “I’ve got you a job,” and we would say where. That’s was the way that life was. |
|  | The hard work that goes along with all this was natural growing up and was ingrained from the beginning. I think most people probably accept that, I guess, that to succeed, you’ve got to work hard. The other part was getting educated. Neither of my parents had a college education. They’re high school grads but they had recognized the value of that education. They sent us to these little Catholic schools. Of course, that’s where my father worked at the Catholic school. We had nuns. Those were the old days. We really had nuns. They had rules, too. Or you got a little whack somewhere. It’s interesting, actually, because those whacks never hurt you really but they got your attention. |
|  | We learned some discipline there as well from the nuns about study and school and whatnot. There is an importance if you work hard and study you’ll get good grades. That was part of the competitive spirit. When you grow up with five kids, you’re competing for everything whether it’s who’s going to get the last piece of chocolate which was never me because I don’t like chocolate. The other four were grateful that I didn’t or the last apple or whatever. Competition was part of all this too learning that competition is part of life and competing is okay. |
|  | We competed in sports as little kids. I even played football until I got in the eighth grade. Now I’m about a hundred and ten pounds and must have been all of five four. I was playing in the backfield. The lineman were these big kids who had grown fast. By the ninth grade I said this is a bad idea and gave that up and I saw it and focused on baseball and basketball, but then I didn’t grow really tall so I bagged all that and played baseball. It’s part of the competition and learning how to play a sport and the rules of sport to. It gets back to, I think, the importance of rules and understanding what the rules are. |
|  | It was a good childhood in that sense in that we didn’t know what we didn’t have and what we had was enough. We had a lot of friends on the street. There was a neighborhood and families were there. It was a mixed neighborhood but the families took care of each other and took care of the kids, made sure we didn’t get in trouble. It was a good environment. It wasn’t a wealthy environment. |
|  | The nice thing about those days, you didn’t know what you didn’t have. There was the radio you’d listen to, the Lone Ranger and whatnot on the radio. Eventually had these little TVs that had circles. You just watched the news. You didn’t know what you didn’t know and you didn’t know what you didn’t have, I mean. That was a good thing because then you just focus on enjoying all the things in life that are actually truly enjoyable, the sunshine, the rain, the neighbors, the friends. That’s what, when you come right down to it is the most important thing, much more important than collecting things, although I do like things too. I guess we all learn to do that. |
|  | This growing up had an impact on me in that sense and I was shaped, I guess. We’re plastic and malleable in those early years. How you’re shaped, how you’re impacted by the environment, your parents, the love you get, the discipline you get and the education you get has a huge impact in shaping where you’ll go and who you’ll be. That was all good stuff. |
|  | When I was in the seventh grade, as I said, my father was working as the janitor at St. Cecilia’s School there in Detroit. The monsignor said to my father, “Which of your boys are going to be a priest?” Being the oldest, he pointed at me. He said, “Mike will do that.” Of course, I was seventh grade and it looked like a pretty good deal. He lived in this really home attached to the church. Somebody answered the door for him if you knocked. My mother cooked over there for them. It looked like a good life. He even drove a nice car. I thought, wow, I’ll do that. |
|  | In the ninth grade they shipped me off to a seminary. It was great. I got this great ethical grounding, lot of discipline again. You don’t talk in the hallways. All the rules. You get demerits. You get demerits. You get too many of them, you get to scrub the floors. Only happened to me once and I learned. |
|  | The education was great. It was, wow, I’ve got suddenly this education and I’m with classes with kids from all over the city of Detroit. I had no clue that if you lived in Groves Point, you lived differently than if you lived down in the city. I learned that by the time I was graduating from high school. |
|  | The big thing was is as I was going through high school I suddenly as I got a little older, suddenly I realized that my interest in biology really exceeded my interest in celibacy. I decided I’d probably have to separate from the seminary. That’s the next change in my life when I decide that I wasn’t going to continue on and be a priest. |
|  | Then there was a trip to college, the local school there, Wayne State University was right there in downtown Detroit. It was affordable. I could work and pay the tuition. I worked through school. It was right there. It was a good education. I had a lot of fun. I made one big mistake, big error I made as a second year college student, first semester. I joined a fraternity. The fraternity wasn’t the mistake. The mistake was that having fun and not paying attention to school was a mistake. Going to class sometimes got in the way of fun and whatnot. I didn’t have a really good semester. |
|  | I decided to be pre-med by then. I started out actually just stepping back a little bit, not going to be a priest. I decided I’ll be a pharmacist. That was based on this profound enlightenment I had. Down the street on the corner was a drug store where you could sit on the stool and get a Cherry Coke. The guy who owned it was the pharmacist. He looked like he did pretty good and was having fun. I said I’ll do that. |
|  | When I got to college and I was in taking all these science course and there were a bunch of kids who said they were going to be doctors. I said that sounds pretty good. We had a doctor who saw us in his basement level of his house. That’s really old days of the family practice doc. I thought that’d be good. That might even be better. I’ll be a doctor. I had no clue what I was doing. No clue. There were no doctors in our family, no college graduates in our family. One thing to another. |
|  | I started taking all those pre-med courses in the first year and I was doing okay. That second year, man, I really bombed out. That was a big failure. I had a one point six grade GPA that semester. At the end of the semester when the grade report came out I said I’m not paying attention. If I want to succeed, I’m going to have to get back to those basic principles that I had learned from my parents, from those nuns, from the priests and the seminary, that you’ve got to work at your studies and you’ve got to succeed and do well if you want to be successful. They taught that to me. |
|  | I buckled down then and corrected myself going forward. It was a repeat of some of those same lessons from failing, from doing badly. The good news was I recognized that after one semester, I woke up and started going to classes, was reading the books, doing what you need to do. That understanding hard work started to pay off with really good grades. Again, when I applied to medical school, because of that one bad semester, my GPA was too low and I never could get into that medical school after three years of college. I went to grad school. I continued on and I applied again. The University of Michigan let me in. I’m forever grateful to the University of Michigan for accepting this dumb kid from Detroit with a one point six in the first semester of the second year and a GPA that was okay. |
|  | That was interesting because then suddenly I’m thrust out. I’m living away from home now for the first time at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor and surrounded now with all these geniuses and kids from Harvard and Johns Hopkins and Yale and their classmates. Boy, that really scared me. That means buckle down to work even harder. As my mother said, hard work didn’t kill anyone. She was right. |
|  | I think looking back, that was one of the important lessons early on in life that you can do it. Most people have the capacity. They have to apply themselves. The other lesson is how do we encourage young people to take full advantage of all their talents and to enjoy life. How do we get at them early enough with that message and help encourage them to success? |
|  | Those are some of the early lessons, I think, I took away from growing up, high school, college. Medical school was a whole new world. There it was, again, about mentors and being inspired by people. When I got into the clinical years, it was like going into a candy store. You’d go on to internal medicine. It was like these people are so smart. Look how they solve all these difficult medical problems. You go to the surgeons and look what they can do to save this person’s life and take that aorta and repair it when it ruptured and the trauma. It was big eyes wide open. Listening the lectures from the scientists at the University of Michigan. Realizing what they were doing in diabetes research, Dr. Fajans and Dr. Kahn who are brilliant scientist, and they’re clinicians. I said, gosh, I want to be one of them. |
|  | This transformation from a kid growing up in the middle of the city of Detroit who had no clue to suddenly wants to be like Dr. Fajans and Dr. Kahn. Then I met Dr. Ritter. These people start becoming mentors for you giving you guidance. I got a job working in Dr. Ritter’s laboratory. Dr. Ritter happened to be an ears, nose and throat surgeon. I had no interest in it really at the time. In fact, I remember looking in the school’s book of all the departments, I remember reading this one. I had taken Latin and a little bit of Greek. I said otolaryngology what the heck is that? Why would you pick that name? It’s too long, too many syllables. Put it down. |
|  | Then here was Dr. Ritter who was this incredibly joyful man, loved to teach, always had jokes and stories. He called us doctor. He was this pillar of fun. He always enjoyed everything he was doing it seemed; took care of children, pediatric otolaryngology. He said, “Would you like to work in my research lab.” This was now I was going to be a senior. I said, “Yeah, I would.” I worked in his lab for six months on deafness and hearing. We would look at the anatomy of guinea pigs who had been exposed to noise and look and see what the damage was done from the noise. It was early work. Nothing that anybody would think was too much today perhaps. |
|  | It was the beginning. Everything progresses. Probably the scariest little job I had was when people put “no code” which meant they weren’t to be resuscitated, in these days, they’d be in the hospital at that time. I was sent up to do their hearing test on them and see if they would sign that they would donate their temporal bones to science. My job would be when they died and they had their postmortem, I would go out and harvest, that’s the nice way to say it, harvest the temporal bones and bring them up to the laboratory. Then I would preserve them properly, then drill out so you could see the cochlea. We would study these type of bones of these people who had died with hearing losses. |
|  | That gave me the bug more for research. Dr. Ritter, with his enthusiasm and love of what he did, I thought I think I’ll be an otolaryngologist. He became a great mentor. I’d babysit his kids but he would give me advice and things of that nature. To have that kind of a mentor who could give you guidance, he was always Teacher of the Year at the medical school. You could see why. He was the prefect of the honor society that I happened to be in. You looked up to a person like that. |
|  | There are a lot of smart people, but a lot of them don’t have those traits, those infectious enthusiasm for what they do that you see. That stuck with me forever. I think that you’ve got to love what you do and enjoy what you do. Choose carefully. Choose carefully something that you really think you’re going to enjoy for life, whatever it is, and then make it joyful. Use your best to inspire others around you. It’s about inspiration. That’s one of the key traits of a leader, I think, is the ability to inspire. |
|  | More lessons learned from people. I did my residency there then. It was about six years. I did research and learned how to become a head and neck surgeon. I learned a lot from that experience as well. I continued on in research, learned how to care for patients properly. I had these great role models of physicians who sat down when they talked down to the patient looked them eye to eye, not looking down. Looked at them. Sometimes they’d hold their hand or pat them on the shoulder and encourage them and give them positive sense of things will be okay. I learned that the patient has to believe that they can achieve and they can beat their disease just as much as I do. Their emotional status and their belief is just as important to their recovery as it is for me, more important than it is for me. |
|  | I learned that from the doctors I was working with. It was truly exciting. I had more mentors. My department chair was this stern man who was loved by everybody. He would send us little messages that would say, “Mike, see me, WPW”. You never wanted one of those in your mailbox. It usually meant you did something wrong or he had a job for you. For me, more than likely, because I tried not to do things wrong, it would be another job. Go research this for me, that kind of thing. He was great. |
|  | The lesson I learned from him was a great one. As I was leaving, he wanted me to stay and be on the faculty. It was Vietnam and we were all going in after our residency. He wrote letters trying to get me out because the war was coming to an end. They kept me and I ended up at Walter Reed, the good story about that after. I’ll never forget as I was leaving he said to me, “Mike, when you go to look for your permanent job after you leave the military, just remember this, it’s not where you work, it’s who you work for.” I’ve never forgotten that. |
|  | Who do you work for? That’s the most important thing. If you’re working for a person, my next job would be a department chair or whatever that I was going to work for or a dean, what do I think of that person? Are they interested in my success or are they just interested in their own success? How do they see the world? That was a great lesson. It’s not where you work, it’s who you work for. I’ll never forget it. I’ve passed that on to people over and over again. I will repeat that here because I think it’s an important one and it’s paid off in so many ways. |
|  | Now, the military experience was terrific. I really enjoyed it. I had no clue. I’m a kid who grew up in Detroit, had no real life experiences. We didn’t travel much except around Detroit and Michigan. By the way, I did get married in medical school. I’ve got come back to that story. I can’t leave that out. That was exciting. I had a cousin who lived across the street from this nice family, the [DelCampo 00:21:46] family. When I left the seminary, because my interest in biology exceeded my interest in celibacy, my cousin pointed out that there was this really nice girl across the street that I should meet. She introduced me and I had my first date with my wife. We go way back. As she says, way too far back. She doesn’t recommend it. |
|  | Trina was great. She was a math major in college which is unusual then, I think. She went to Michigan State. She got a scholarship. It was pretty good. She was pretty smart. Of course, Michigan State, when you’re up in Ann Arbor, it’s like what? It was great. She was terrific. I really learned a lot from her and different points of view. I think the notion of take a little time to reflect, to think a little bit deeper. I could get real superficial. Get it done. Next. She would drive down the questions. She was clearly a much better judge of people, in a way. I just accepted everybody the way they were which is useful. She was more diagnostic into who they were and what they were like. |
|  | It was really something I learned from her is really how to evaluate people much more deeply and more thoughtfully and pick your friends for good reasons that are beyond just superficial reasons. It was great. It was great being married with her. |
|  | We had two kids, all of them while we were in medical school, which was the way it used to be, I guess. She had a job so she worked and paid our way pretty much through medical school. I had a part-time job. She was really the backbone and strength of our family and still today is that thoughtful person who looks at things in a deep way emotionally and philosophically. I’m the more charge ahead. Let’s do it and get it done now. That other stuff is nice but I don’t have time for that. It’s good to have that balance in your life. It brings you back to ground where you need to be, well-grounded. |
|  | That’s the other part of learning from Trina is to be more attentive to people around you, to understand them, to have that antennae that make you much more self-aware and aware of the situation. When the person walks in the room, you can look at them and see are they relaxed, are they tense, are they upset, and read that without them having to say it. |
|  | That was important learning lessons from Trina is being able to see the situation, and to feel other people’s feelings and be aware of them and pay attention to them. They become more and more important in leadership as you lead more and more complex adaptive organizations, of understanding these reporting relationships, the people you have. You’re counting on them to get things done and being able to understand or to feel or sense when they aren’t on-target, they don’t feel right, to be able to help them and to understand them. Another, I think, important trait of a leader is to have enough self-awareness and to have enough awareness of other people and exactly what’s their emotional status. How are they feeling about what they’re doing? |
|  | At any rate, all those things happened. I enjoyed my military experience. I learned a lot. It got us out of Michigan for the first time in our lives. We realized there’s a thing called spring. Flowers actually came up in February, not in May. I remember driving back from Williamsburg with Trina and the two kids who are now about five and six or seven. I think, this is nice. There must be some job we can get somewhere in this area. Called my old boss who told me it’s not where you live, it’s who you work for. |
|  | Anyhow, I started looking for my first academic job. I knew it was going to be in academics. I had moonlighted in the military. They let me have a half day to do whatever I wanted. They said moonlighting was okay. I moonlighted in a private practice, otolaryngologist’s office. As it was getting near the end of my term in the military, he offered me to join his practice. I said no I don’t think so. He came back and said I’ll give it to you because he was going to retire, which was very generous. I just couldn’t see myself doing that. |
|  | Then I started looking around. I had heard that this Navy captain from San Diego had retired and was taking the chair at the University of Virginia of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery. I had met him a few times. I had met him because when I took the oral examinations to pass the boards, he was my examiner. I did pretty good on those boards. I didn’t get the one point six anymore. I got the four point oh. I heard about it through some of my Navy friends, young residents that would come to Walter Reed for a course I was teaching. I picked up the phone and I called Dr. Cantrell. I said, “Dr. Cantrell, I hear you’re moving to Virginia. Would you be looking for any faculty?” He said “Yes.” He said, “I am, and I was thinking about calling you.” I said, “Great.” |
|  | Then I called Dr. Work who is my old chair. I had called him before about somebody out in California and Sacramento and somebody in Iowa and somebody in Pittsburgh. He would give me, “Well, it might be okay,” or “No way. He won’t be helping you at all. All he will want is you to help him.” When I mentioned Bob Cantrell, he just said two words, “Take it.” That’s it. Take it. That was his style. When he says take it, you do it. That was such a payoff. |
|  | Bob was such a great mentor again. Now, here’s another mentor in my life and a teacher. I arrive. He’s a Navy captain. He’s got all that discipline and everything else. He’s building the small program and he’s going to make into something great. What I learned from Bob, amongst many things, was a positive attitude but the most important thing about being a chair is you’ve got to help the people who report to you succeed. You want to promote those people and help them to be successful. He was marvelous at that. Boy, he’d get you appointed to committees nationally. He would use his own position to help you succeed. He would push you to get your research lab set up and get it operational and publish the papers. |
|  | He was really all about helping the people in department do well. What a lesson I’ve learned that it’s not about you. It’s about the people who work for you. If they succeed, you succeed. A lesson I learned was you’ve got to lead by inspiration, not by intimidation. Two, that you need to submerge your own ego so that other egos can rise up around you. |
|  | That lesson became important to me as I realized how that worked. When I became a department chairman, I adopted that same attitude. I wanted to be like Bob. I was the chair. I was a professor at Johns Hopkins now. I can’t be a professor professor. I need to help my team become professors. I want our department to be the best in the world and then I want to recruit some of the best young people to my department to help make that happen. |
|  | That’s a combination of what I learned in life, whether it was from the nuns of working hard and my mom and dad of working hard and following rules, the military and structure and order leads to success, from Bob of inspiration of raising up others around you and really applied that as a department chair. Here Johns Hopkins had no stature nationally at the time, had zero research dollars coming in and a few people doing some research, not much. The clinical business was solid but not really exceptional. Turning that around and recruiting in new people, inspiring some of the people who were there to rise up, and then many of them decided it wasn’t for them anymore and they left. That was okay. It was okay because they weren’t going to fit the new vision. |
|  | I remember one of the early things I did after about three months, I went and I visited with each faculty member. I told them what I thought a Johns Hopkins faculty in Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery needed to look like and that my job was to help them achieve that. A number of them came up to me and said, “I can’t do that and I don’t want to do that.” I said, “Fine. What do you want to do?” We’d help them. They’d go, leave and go find something else to do. I would then go out and recruit somebody and fill that spot. |
|  | It worked for both people. Everybody was happy in the end. I was really happy. Our department then rose up and became, today it’s the number one department in the country. That’s because we’ve had a series of leaders there that have made that happen. That’s the succession of leadership has also been a very important part of what we do in our lives. How do we prepare people to be our successor either there or elsewhere? |
|  | I listen to people. Sometimes I heard this at Emory a fair amount. “They left.” I said, “Yeah, but what did they leave to do?” If they leave to take another leadership position at another institution, that’s what we do. We produce leaders for other institutions. That’s good. If they depart for that, we are successful. Some of them have a hard time understanding that. They think it’s failure if somebody leaves. You know how in the military you rotate all the time anyhow. In fact, you’re measured by that next rotation that puts you into a higher position. |
|  | At Hopkins, it was like that. You want to produce leaders internally. You want to promote them like Bob Cantrell did for his team at Virginia. We would do that at Hopkins getting people into the committees, even the nurses. I remember getting the nurses. A couple of the nurses who were leading our service, our ward, I said, “I want the two of you to get involved with this the side of Head and Neck nurses.” “We don’t get funding to do this.” I said, “We’ll pay your way. I want you to be there.” They started going. After a year I said, “I want you guys to be president of this organization. I want you to lead it.” Quite frankly, within a few more years, they were just because you push them, you inspire them and they’re talented people so they can do it. Give them a little few tools and turn them loose. It’s fun. |
|  | Everything isn’t peaches and cream. The department was losing money when I went there. I didn’t know anything about the business of medicine in 1984 when I went to Johns Hopkins. I did science. At the time we called it science. Today you would call it piddling around. I did science. I taught. I love to teach students. I taught the medical students a lot. I taught the residents. I was technically a very good surgeon, at least I like to think so, and had a reputation. People were referring complex cases to me. |
|  | When I went to Hopkins from Virginia and I looked at the budget and I thought, whoa, where’s the money. They’re losing money. How could that be? I didn’t know how you do a bill. Bob had that all covered which is nice. As a young faulty you don’t worry about any of that stuff. You want to worry about your career. Bob had it covered. I had to get into that, figure out what are the problems and how do we straighten it out. |
|  | I had to stop everything and really get into that piece in depth which I did. I figured out there were things that needed to change at Johns Hopkins. The billing system was okay, it wasn’t great. I found out there was a better billing system, went to see the dean. Said, “I’d like to switch my billing off your system to this.” He said, “You can’t do that. He said, “You’ve got to be on my system.” Left that a little disappointed. I was thinking I’m going to be on the crappy billing system. That’s a bad idea. |
|  | I had to figure that out, did some work-arounds. I wanted data. This was back before spreadsheets were just coming out. I wanted data on the productivity of every faculty member; what were we billing, what were we collecting, how much were we writing off, how much was professional courtesy, etc. so I could track every faculty member and see how productive they were. I needed data. That’s a good scientist. |
|  | I might have been the first person there starting to collect data on everybody. Annoyed some of the folks but I made it transparent because I believe in transparency. I showed the budget at our faculty meetings and I’d bring the staff to the faculty meetings too. Here’s what it looks like, guys. This ain’t good. Got ideas? I’d start showing the breakdowns. People didn’t like so much that they might see their data. Didn’t put names on it, but you could see that there’s Faculty A, B, C, D, E. You could see who was more productive and who wasn’t. |
|  | We started turning things around that way. One of the problems, they had what I call was a problem that I learned early on at Hopkins was that I had a lawyer patient come in who had something on their vocal cord. I needed to remove it. The way you’d do that at the time is micro-surgical. I came out and told my assistant, schedule Mr. So-and-so for an outpatient suspension micro laryngoscopy. The response was, “What do you mean outpatient?” I said, “Outpatient. They come in the morning, you do it and they go home.” They said, “We don’t do that here at Johns Hopkins.” That was something. I said, “I promised him as a lawyer. I better go up to the OR and talk to the anesthesiologist about this. I want to do at least one.” |
|  | I talked to the anesthesiologist. He said, “Yeah, we need to get started on that.” He said, “We’re a little bit behind on that.” I said, “I promised him we’d do it.” I said, “Don’t you think there’s a way we could get this done?” He said, “Yeah, we could,” he said, “but you better check with the head nurse and see if she’s okay with it.” Ah, yes, confirm my opinion. The nurses really are the people that are in charge. They really are because they’re there all the time. The rest are there part of the time. I saw the head nurse and I explained the problem. |
|  | She was sympathetic to this dumbo from Virginia who showed up promising patients. She said, “Okay, let’s do it.” She said, “I know we’re going to have to get into this anyhow.” She said, “We’ve got a little closet. If you bring him up in the morning, he’ll change in the closet. The anesthesiologist can then put him on a gurney, we’ll take him to get him ready and they can do the anesthesia, you can do your case. Take him to recovery. Once he’s fully recovered, get dressed up and you can take him downstairs. His wife can take him home.” We ended up doing the first outpatient surgery at Johns Hopkins in 1984. |
|  | I thought, this is nuts. I got a lot of these that I’ve got to do. Admitting them doesn’t make any sense. At the time, Medicare just started what was called DRGs where they’re paying you a lump payment for an admission based on the diagnosis, diagnosis-related groups. If you did something one day, you got the same payment as you did for five days. Why would you want to keep somebody in for five days unless they needed to be in for five days? |
|  | I thought, what does it cost to spend a night in the hospital. I have no clue. I go down, I asked one of the administrators what’s it cost to stay in the hospital and he gives me a number. It was an average number. Nothing to do with reality but an average number. I then went up to the OR logs, they’re paper. I started going through the OR logs for the past three months and picked every case in ENT I thought could be done as an outpatient. You just multiply by the number and say this is how much money you’d save it you did it as an outpatient. You don’t spend that. |
|  | Anyhow, I said that’s a pretty good number but let me go back and do the whole book. I did generals for everybody’s through the whole OR book and picked how many cases could be done as an outpatient. Multiply by the number and now it’s in the millions. Then I go make an appointment to see the CEO of the health system who’s this really nice guy, actually a visionary in health care. It took three or four weeks for me to get in to see him. I went down and I saw Dr. Heyssel. Hopkins had this tradition that the physician was the CEO of the hospitals. |
|  | Of course, he invited me into his lovely big office. He’s sitting down at his table, his conference table. He’s got a chair and he’s leaning back in his chair. He’s a great guy. He says sit down. “How are you doing? What do you think about being at Hopkins?” Of course I tell him how wonderful it is. There’s never been in a place like this except maybe Michigan. It was a really great spot and I was having a blast. He’s smiling and, of course, loving it. I said, “I have a problem I could use your help with.” He said, “What’s the problem?” I said, “We can’t do outpatient surgery here yet. We’re not set up for that. We really need to get with that and get that started.” “Yeah,” he said, “You’re right.” He said, “It’s been on my mind. We need to get that going.” |
|  | I said, “Just to tell you what I did,” so I tell him what I did. I count up all these cases and talked to Mr. [Halley 00:40:24] and he gave me this number I can multiply. It would save this many millions of dollars a year. He looks at me and he says, “You know what? Exactly.” His eyes got big. He got excited. He says, “You know, we’re going to get this done.” He said, “I’m going to put you in charge of an adhoc committee to get this done.” I said, Dr. Heyssel, I didn’t come down here to be in charge of a committee. I just want to get this done.” He said, “No,” he said, You’re going to do it.” He said, “I’ll assign one of our administrators to work with you. We’ll make a committee.” |
|  | Anyhow, without talking about any of the politics and the people who were pissed off that I would change something like this. Some of the surgeons said, “Who would ever want to come in the morning of surgery? They can come in the night before and get a good night’s sleep and have the surgery first thing in the morning.” I’m thinking good night’s sleep in a hospital? The food, you don’t go to the hospital for the food. It’s awful. |
|  | Anyhow, despite some resistance, it was bound to happen, had to happen. Yes, there were other people who were mad that I was chairing the committee and they weren’t chairing the committee and all that. I just managed through that. We set it up. I let all the smart people around me dream it up. It looked good. Once we had the plans all in place, the chair of anesthesia who really wanted to be in charge of all this but who I told him let’s just get it done. I said to him, “I don’t want run an outpatient surgery unit. I just want to get my patients through it. You can run it.” He loved that. I was going to let him be the boss of it. Who wants to do that? In the end, we had it all set up. What was a miracle was, the end of that year, Medicare/Medicaid mandated outpatient surgery. It wasn’t optional anymore. It looked like I was prescient. |
|  | The next thing I know, because I came up with the solution to a problem, got it done before we got whacked, we would have had big penalties, the health system obviously thought I had something, some talent. He starts assigning me to a bunch of committees. I’m helping him. I’m down there telling him we’ve got to move more of our practice into the outpatient setting. We need outpatient surgery. We didn’t have any of that. We need better outpatient facilities. They need to be more convenient for patients. I’m pushing. I’m on more committees. |
|  | Within two years, suddenly I get called over to the dean’s office. The dean says to me, “I’ve been talking with Dr. Heyssel. We think we need to create a position of the associate dean for clinical practice here. We’d like you to be that dean.” My department’s turned around. It’s making money. We’re recruiting good people. We’ve got research going on. Things are going well. They want me to do two jobs. I said, “What is the job that needs to be done? He listed off five things. I said, “Okay, let me think about it and I’ll get back to you.” I said, “Would you call and talk to some of the other department chairs, chair of surgery, chair of medicine and make sure they’re comfortable with me in this position? He said, “I’ll do that, you do your part.” |
|  | I go home and I talk to Trina. We talk about it. It’s more work. It’s going to interfere with my fun I’m having to some extent. The more I thought about it, the more I thought somebody’s going to come in and do this and has to make these changes and has to run the practice and get it organized for our success. They can hire somebody else to do it to me or I can take the job and do it to myself. I’m much more comfortable with the latter. If you’re going to change, change it yourself than have somebody change you. |
|  | I thought the five things, I won’t go through them but they were mostly straightforward. I can get this done in a couple of years and then they can get somebody else to do this job and life will be good. I had to organize the practice. They were all individual things being done by the department’s mom and pop shops. Wanted to pull it all together into one big organization, et cetera. |
|  | Within a couple of years we had a practice organization. There were doc chairs, the departments who were resistant. I would go out and say, “If we can offer you a better product for a better price and you get better collections, would you sign up for it?” “Sure, but you’re not going to achieve that.” I said, “If we do, would you?” “Sure.” One of them was so resistant, I said, “You’ll be the last. If you don’t, you don’t have to.” Of course, the fun part was getting to the last. Showed him all the data. He said, “Put me on it.” These were friends. These people really were friends. They were my colleagues, department chairs. I have a small department and some of these people have massive departments with four or five hundred faculty. I’ve got twenty. |
|  | It was an experience. After three years of this, it’s all in order and I’m working the dean’s office, running back and forth to my department. I told the dean, “It’s time for you to get somebody to do this job so I can get back to running my department.” That’s when the dean told me he was going to retire and that would I continue until the next dean came on, the next dean could appoint. |
|  | This dean was great. I learned a lot from him over those three years. I learned about the research enterprise. Now I was on the inside of the medical school administratively. I started learning about research, research administration. Not how to do it, but from the colleagues. I started learning about the nuts and bolts of our research operation, planning for research space, the idea to bring on new buildings and research, hearing about medical education, how we were doing, how would we reshape our educational programs, et cetera, the resistance to these thing. Now I’m seeing it from another perspective. It was enjoyable but I was ready to get back to running the department. |
|  | I hung on there. The dean announced his retirement. They do a search. The next thing I know I’m the next dean, not really looking for that job. That’s another thing, another lesson. One lesson from this story, of course, is you’ve got to be a problem solver. When you see a problem, you don’t whine about it. That’s what I see mostly. People whine. Complain. Whine and complain. They don’t bring solutions. I tell people since I’ve been in leadership positions, I know we’ve got problems. Identify the problems and bring me the solution. If you’re just going to come up and whine about the problem, don’t even bother because I’m going to throw you out of my office. I’m not going to listen to that. I don’t need to listen to that. I know we’ve got problems. Bring me solutions. |
|  | I like solutions from the ground floor because they’re right there. Some of them are dumb and some of them are brilliant. That really was a lesson, I think, learned during that time of you’ve got to love problems and you better solve problems in the context of the larger institution. If you’ve got a problem in your department and you can solve it on your own, you don’t need anybody else to fix it because it’s your responsibility. When it requires the organization to respond and maybe change, then you need to craft that solution how it benefits the institution. Once you start getting that kind of thinking then the world changes. That’s when you start becoming a real leader of an organization, when you start solving problems that benefit the whole organization. I tell people that over again. |
|  | That’s an important lesson to keep in mind is love problems. Better love them because that’s all you’re going to hear. People don’t stop in your office to tell you how wonderful you are. If they do, be suspicious. If they stop and they give you a problem, they want you to help them fix it. You tell them bring me a solution. Think of it, that solution, the context of how does that improve the whole organization. Suddenly you’re thinking differently. You’re thinking like a leader. That’s been a success. I think that’s been important. It’s also the way you are training other leaders around you to be better leaders themselves. A lot of people just don’t get it. They don’t recognize that’s the better way to get your problem solved is solving for the whole. Those are good experiences there. I can go on and on about these kind of things. It’s really been fun in that sense of you continue to learn as you go and then you try to teach and pass it on. |
|  | The big opportunity came for me career-wise was when the Emory job opened up. Most people say Johns Hopkins, Emory? Johns Hopkins, you’re the dean of a medical school. I did that for six years. I revamped the curriculum. We opened a new research building, opened a new ambulatory care building. One of my passions was that. That was one of my assignments from the prior dean was build that building. I had to figure how to pay for it, too. That’s another thing you learn on their go. I can dream of anything but you actually have to pay for things and I had to figure out how I’m going to get people to pay rent to use it and get everybody on board. Creating consensus is a big part of these jobs as well. How do you get people on board with a direction? |
|  | That’s another thing I learned during my deanship was that you’ve got to have a vision of where you’re trying to go. Where is the place going? Where are you trying to go? Where are you trying to take it? Not you, but where are we going to go? People think of vision as some lofty statement that has no end results. They’re talking about a mission. They don’t understand the difference between mission and vision. |
|  | A vision is where are we going to be in three to five years. A mission is something that’s strong and lasting and hopefully will be there forever, that we’re going to do research to improve the health of humanity. That’s a mission. We usually write that out in about a thousand words. Nobody can remember it. A vision should be something that’s pithy, concise and as a statement of where we’re going to be and where we’re going to go. |
|  | I believe that having an inspiring, compelling vision, is how you change culture. You don’t change culture by saying to people we’ve got to change our culture. To what? We like our culture. Culture eats strategy for lunch. That’s just stupid. If you don’t do things, nothing changes. Culture without a strategy does what? You hope something will happen right. If you want to change a culture, articulate that vision where we’ve got to go. It’s got to be compelling and have a strategy that will make it happen and a plan to implement the strategy. If you put that all together, the culture will be matched up with the vision, whatever that means. |
|  | People use a lot of adjectives. We’re going to be honest and fair and respectful. It’s like my mamma told me that when I was six. If I didn’t, she’d kick my butt. How does that change this organization? What is it we want to achieve as an organization? Be a bunch of nice folks? Great. That’s not going to make us great. It’s going to make us a nice place. If that satisfies you as a leader, God bless you. Enjoy it and hope that everybody else around you is smarter and can get something done without you. |
|  | That’s another thing in a leader is you’ve got to be able to make decisions. I’d say to people you’ve got to listen and learn. You’ve got to decide and act. Four things. Listen, learn, decide, act. It’s not listen, listen, listen, listen, listen, listen, listen, listen, listen, listen and maybe I’ll decide some year. That doesn’t work. You have to have some judgment. Listen, learn because we always are learning, hear from other people and then decide and then action becomes important. If it doesn’t go right, correction. Correct the steps, redirect, keep us on path. |
|  | That’s another important thing for a leader is that listen, learn, decide, act. Do not pretend you’re the smartest man in the room. When you’re at Johns Hopkins and you’re the dean, you’re surrounded by everybody who’s really smart. My assumption is get in a room, always assume you’re the stupid one. You’re the doofus in the room. Everybody else is smarter. That really resonates with everybody else. Many of them are smarter. Some of them are actually more intelligent but not smart at all. |
|  | The difference between intelligence and being smart, that’s the practical side of life. That’s another thing I’d like to say is, God’s greatest gift to mankind is common sense. If you don’t have it, be a follower, please. Do not try to lead. It’s amazing how many people have a common sense deficit. This is a coat jacket. What’s this? I don’t know. What is that? Is that an arm? No, it’s a coat jacket, right? Come on. That’s common sense. That’s another aside of life that I try to pass on to people. |
|  | I tell people, when I came to Emory, the traction at Emory was I was looking at the world outside now. I’ve been six years as a dean of medicine. We’ve changed the curriculum, well recognized, going well. Both my children graduated from medical school. There I get to hand them the diploma which was really a blast, neither of whom told me they’re going to be a doctor but ultimately changed their mind and went to Hopkins for medicine. That was wonderful. |
|  | I get this option of coming to Emory. What was attractive is that Emory had things totally integrated. The clinical business, the doctor business, the hospital business doctor business. Had the medical school, public health and nursing and a primate center. They’re all under one organizational structure. It struck me how much more you could accomplish if you bring nursing, medicine, the health professions together, you apply public health principles, you bring science into it and you have a clinical delivery system. What a great way to do things. |
|  | It was in a good city. Here my analysis was here’s Atlanta, a city that’s growing rapidly. It’s not shrinking like many other cities in the country were in 1996 getting smaller. You saw the corporate world was merging and consolidating. Cities were becoming branch office towns, not headquarter towns. Atlanta was going a different direction. You looked and saw this is an exciting place. The Olympics were just coming to town. The place was on the map. I saw this and said this is going to be the capital of the South. Of course, we’re in a battle, I guess, with Houston and Dallas and whoever else. |
|  | It was a great opportunity, I thought, of a great institution, a really solid institution. It wasn’t up to the Hopkins standards by quite a bit but was in a position to move up to that with good leadership, good people. Coming down here was really exciting and there was that opportunity. I loved the board members. They were so gracious and so enthusiastic. It gets back to who do you work for. The university president is my direct boss, but my board of directors, they are an important part of it. How much do they embrace the vision you have and the direction you want to go into. Can you get them to embrace it? When I was was on the board at the time, [Coke chairman 00:55:49], he was a marvelous man with great insights. Jimmy Williams who was the CEO of Sun Trust was remarkable. I learned so much for him. |
|  | Of course, now I was in the South which is a real transition from Michigan and even D.C. Suddenly you’re in the South and people say things a little differently in the South. It was fun. People tell stories. If you talk to somebody, I talked to Jim Williams about a problem. Rather than giving you an answer, and asking for his advice, he’d give you a story. It took me a while to figure out that that was the answer. Not too long, but pretty quickly I realized, hold it, when he tells you a story, that’s the answer. I’d listen to the story and okay, now I get it. |
|  | It was really remarkable. That was so much, I think, a Southern style of storytelling and the way people communicate a little bit differently but actually quite enjoyably. The [Rolands 00:56:49] family here were incredible. Randall Rolands is one of these people who is like a genius. Whatever the problem is, he just gets “it”. You give him a problem. He gets right to the “it”. I like to say everything has an “it”. Some of you will get “it”, some people don’t get “it”. |
|  | Speaking of “it”, I’ll never forget, I was on a plane coming back, this is where I learned about “it”. I was coming back on a plane from Cayman Island. We had our liability insurance company down there. On the way back, I get in the seat. Next to me is this guy. He sees me reading my medical books. He leans over and says, “I’m a doctor.” Anyhow, he’s talking at me. Finally, I turned the tables and asked him what he did. He said, “I’m not very smart. I’m just,” and he starts going on about his business successes. He told me he had no education. I loved it when he said, “I don’t know.” He said, “I don’t know. People bring me things and I get “it”.” He said, “Everything has an “it” and I just get “it”. Whatever the “it” is, I get “it” really fast.” |
|  | I listened to him talking in a simple way. I’m not very smart. I have some education but not much. I just get “it”. Every deal has an “it”. He was a business guy. I started thinking about “it”. Do people get “it”? A lot of people don’t get “it”. What’s the “it”? Everything has an “it”. I like that. You’ve got to get “it”, whatever “it” is. Every problem has an “it”. There’s something around it that drives it. If somebody wants to get rid of something, why? What’s the reason behind it? |
|  | It resonated with me because my favorite question has been “why” since I was a little kid, I liked to ask “why”. It annoys some people. Actually you learn a lot. The difference between stupid and ignorant. Ignorant is the lack of information and knowledge. If you ask why, that’s how you begin to gain knowledge and information. Sometimes there may not be an answer. That was what was attractive about research. You ask why. When there’s not an answer, you say, that’s cool. Maybe I can find the answer. That’s great. That’s where discovery comes from. Not asking why and getting the answer. If the answer’s already known that’s good. You learn something. If you’re going to do research, they already did that research. That’s over with. Find a hard question that nobody knows the answer to and go find the answer. |
|  | That applies to life as well in general and to good leadership. One of the things that happened back in ninety-two was the Clinton’s got elected. Bill got elected to president. They decided they’re going to take on health care reform. Hillary Clinton was going to be in charge of that as you recall. I remember thinking about changes that we were needing to make. I had been the dean a couple of years. We were looking at education and how some things in graduate medical education might evolve and change, the number of doctors, whether too many were enough, et cetera. |
|  | Another thing that changed some of my direction was I got a call. I had put in a little report. I got a call from Robert Pear, he’s a New York Times reporter. Did a lot of health policy, health finance in the business section. It was a Monday night. I guess the week before Hillary Clinton was asked by I think Stark to leave behind a copy of the plan that they had. Nobody had seen the full plan. I heard about it over the weekend. On Monday morning I called a lawyer friend of mine in D.C. and said could you send me a copy of the plan, of which he said we don’t have that plan, of course. By ten o’clock, it was couriered there and I had it. I was going through it and I got some of my team together. We were looking at things in it. |
|  | That night, I get this call from Robert Pear from The New York Times. He said, “Dean Johns,” he said, “what do you think of what’s going on the reform bill?” I said, “What part are you talking about?” He said, “I want to talk about medical education and you’re a dean of the medical school.” I said, “What part of the bill did you want to talk about?” I said, “What page are you looking at?” He said, “You’ve got a copy?” I said, “Yeah.” We started going through this bill. I’m giving some perspectives, my candid viewpoints. |
|  | That was Monday night. By Wednesday morning, my phone is ringing about six a.m. It was the news line to ask me as question. I hadn’t seen any newspapers. Apparently, it was in the front page of the New York Times, he had his article. Down below the fold had some quote from me about something with medical education. I thought maybe he needed some adjustment and how it could be misused. By the time I got to work that morning, I had already had a call from Ira Magaziner who was, in fact, the chief planner with Hillary saying would I call him back. |
|  | I called back. Of course you get the usually he’ll call you back thing. Of course, within two seconds he calls me back. He said, “I read what you said in The New York Times today.” He said, “I think you’re correct. He said, “Would you rewrite that for me?” I’m stunned. “Okay. Yeah, I’d be happy to rewrite it for you. How do you want me to get it back to you?” He said, “Here’s my fax number. Just fax it back.” I get my team together. We go through the whole bill again. That part was on graduate medical education. We actually basically rewrite it. We use the same font type, the same thing. |
|  | Then we look at the organizational bill, the way they have it organized. We reorganize the flow. We sent them back. I said chapter organization and here’s the text for what we would do. That was done by maybe about four o’clock. We send that back to him and just fits right into their font size. Perfect. By the end of the day I get another call from him saying would you come to the White House on Saturday? We’re going to invite a bunch of deans down here. We want to hear their opinions. |
|  | Suddenly they’re realizing they’re making profound changes and statements about things. You’ve got a bunch of deans who are going to be critical of this. That’s not good. We better find out what they think. It was great. We went down on Saturday morning. I think there might have been about nine or ten of us from medical school deans around the country: Harvard, Yale, Penn, Duke, Hopkins, Florida, Cincinnati, Washington, Stanford. Anyhow, we’re there and we’re having this great conversation with them. They obviously are super intelligent people and really studied health care but they’ve not ever done it. They don’t have the practical side. |
|  | We had a good conversation. In the end they asked us if we would continue to respond and give them our feedback. That was interesting. We said sure. We’d be happy to do that. Before we left, the dean of Harvard said, “Why don’t we have Mike coordinate this because he’s close to D.C.?” I’m this kid. I was forty-eight when I was the Dean of Medicine. Most of the deans were probably fifty-five to sixty. I’m this baby being told to do this which was great. That was fun. We got involved in a lot to do with rewriting parts of the health reform bill of the Clinton’s. |
|  | That got me involved in that kind of thinking and the politics of health care to some extent and seeing how that bill really worked its way through and the complexity of it going through. Then what happened to it and the lessons that could be learned from how do you engage a broader group of people before you take it and dump it on the Hill. |
|  | I think that kind of an experience of sitting in the White House with a bunch of really brilliant deans and the leadership in the White House, what it did was it really made me think more about policy and how does policy influence what we do and then how should we be influencing policy and helping to instruct policymakers. It said you’ve got to become engaged. You can’t just sit in your cocoon, in your Ivory Tower and just do something and expect it’s all going to multiply out from there. |
|  | Trying to get out there in that penetrating point in policy and writing up your ideas and putting them on paper and trying to get out. You’ve got to get on the Hill. I’ve watched how complicated that can be of getting people to understand. These are intelligent people sitting there. They have ideological beliefs. It’s a problem for me because I don’t just accept ideology. I accept facts as the “why”. If you give me the facts, I’ll look at them and then I’ll decide. Don’t tell me this is the way it is because my ideology is that all people should do A, B, and C or not do A, B, and C. I don’t know. I can’t say that. All people aren’t the same. I look at facts. |
|  | I say yeah. Sometimes I’m a Republican. Sometimes a Democrat. It depends. I’ve got to look at the issue, don’t you? You decide without really understanding the issue, because you feel this way? Give me a break. I can’t do that. I don’t feel like making a decision that way today. I think I’ll make it this way. Oh great. It looks ugly. But it feels like fun. I just did it different. That doesn’t make any sense. What the best? Of course, then we argue about the best. That does have some philosophical sides of what is best for a country and a nation. Very complicated. |
|  | It did start to gel, the importance of that and then I became much more involved pulling together teams of academic leaders. We did it again in 2008, pulled together. The dean at Hopkins said, “Mike why don’t you go to that group that you had and let’s do that again.” We did. We got about eight or ten academic health center leaders. We started focusing on the ACA before it was written, and trying to give input and guidance to what we thought was important from our perspective. It’s like an obligation. You could say it’s extra work. I don’t want to do. Let Mikey do it. Mikey does it. It’s fun. |
|  | I got that experience. By then I was involved in the Institution of Medicine, the National Academy of Sciences, on committees there and doing some Hill work. Learned how to go down and express our opinions. I grew with that as well. That became part of it. |
|  | The other part of the role there was our international programs and building international relationships in the University of Hong Kong, in China, in Singapore. We started developing more international outreach at the time. That was fascinating learning about these countries and what they were doing in science and health care. This is a long way from Yosemite and Detroit where I grew up not knowing the work [introduced 01:08:27] by those names. I guess I might have known that. |
|  | The whole Hopkins experience was really mind blowing and great. Terrific trustees. Brilliant people like Mike Bloomberg around and Morris Offit, New Yorkers who were making a difference in their worlds big time. Mike Armstrong from IBM and later G.M. Hughes and AT&T. These people, you could really talk to those just transferring my life and my experiences realizing how much bigger the world is than just in medicine and how so much more impacts what we do than what we do ourselves. |
|  | What we do in the care of a patient is us, between that patient and the doctor, the nurses. When it comes to policy or health care or education, it’s a much larger world. You’ve got to live in that world if you’re going to be a leader. You need to lead in that world as well. You’ve got to be a thought leader. You’ve got to think creatively and look at how do we, in fact, enhance and improve, not only what you own and have to operate but the state of those affairs in this country and internationally as well. |
|  | Hopkins was a great growing experience for six years there. Forty-eight to fifty-four in my life. Something I had never anticipated. If people said did you always want to be a dean? I would say gungadean? What’s a dean? I didn’t know much about that. To end up being one is scary, but it was a fabulous experience of life. Hopkins is such a remarkable place with remarkable people in it. You could go on forever about that, from prior to the dean who hired me who was an amazing guy, a real steward of what the mission was and a champion for that. |
|  | Anyhow, I end up at Emory. I started into that conversation. What I learned after a while thinking about what is my job. I have three deans, the director of a primate center. I’ve got a few hospitals. I’ve got a large physician practice organization. I’ve got people who run all those and they’ve got people who run various parts of that. What is my job? |
|  | My job, in the end as you think it through, is I’ve got to lead. I have to hold people accountable for making things happen. What are those things going to happen? You have to have a vision of where you want to go. Otherwise, you wobble around. It has to be compelling. It has to be inspiring. Part of the job is a vision and to inspire. |
|  | Second, you really have to drive a strategy. A lot of people think the strategy is they dream up a thing and they tell everybody else this is what you’re going to do. My view is you’ve got to win people over particularly when you’re changing. How do you engage a lot of people in a process so that in the end they actually own the strategy, not you? They helped to create that strategy, learning how to really do a strategic planning process. What does it take to implement it? What is the specific plans of implementing? We know what the strategic initiatives are. How do you make that happen? You’ve got to have a specific plan. |
|  | What are the resources needed to make that happen? You start putting that together and it’s broadly understood and known people critique it or support it. In the end, you’ve got a plan. Now you’ve got that roadmap you’re driving things by. Yes, you will adjust and change. The other piece of it was you’ve got to have a group, a super committee, that’s going to monitor the progress and make sure that progress is moving forward. You can’t be a czar. You can try if you like but that doesn’t work. You can lead by inspiration, not by intimidation. |
|  | Being able to put in place a plan like that here in Atlanta at Emory University and then to start seeing the results. I learned also then that you’ve got people who are your direct reports. They have to be accountable for what they’re going to do. The other thing I learned that I like is that you ask them to give you the top six or seven things that they’re going to accomplish in this next year. You discuss it with them. You agree or don’t agree. You modify and adjust them. Then you’ve got their objectives for the year, the core objectives. They’re in keeping with the plan and everything else. They have other things they’re going to do too, of course. We’re talking about the high level. Your job is to hold them accountable for that. |
|  | It’s pretty easy to get people to create objectives. The harder part for a leader is actually to hold people accountable. A lot of these people become your friends. When they fail, you can’t just say they’re my buddy. They screwed up. Let it go. The hardest part is when somebody stops consistently hitting their targets that they agreed to or that they don’t come back and say we can’t hit this. This is why. We’re going to have to adjust downward. You say we’d better adjust downward, adjust the course. That’s good. You agreed to that. Of course, for them to not hit a target and not tell you, gone. They’re not playing on the team. |
|  | I think the hardest part is the gone. You’ve got to sever people from their leadership position and move on because the leadership needs to change. That, to me, is maybe the most gut-wrenching part of the job, coming to that decision. You get to know people. I like the people that I work with in general. None of them are evil. If they’re evil, we would have put them in jail a long time ago. They’re usually highly competent to get that high. |
|  | On the other hand, there are things you miss. Sometimes they can’t get the job done and you’ve got to get somebody who can. That’s, I think, one of the hard jobs of being the leader is making that decision to do the cut and make a change in leadership at different levels. It’s not enjoyable no matter how you do it. When it’s over with, you hope that things move on right and you can keep a good relationship with that person to the best you can. Some of them will be angry, but hopefully not and hopefully won’t last. That’s the responsibility of leadership. If you don’t feel like you want to ever do that then don’t do that job. |
|  | That’s the other part is I think people need to realize what is the job more than just the numbers that they’re going to hit. What’s the rest of the responsibility they have in these leadership positions and that they’ve got the courage to execute on that when they have to make a change or do what’s called the hard thing? The hard things are that type thing, the emotional things. |
|  | Another piece of a good leader, I think I tell people is, you look out at what’s going on in the world, in your world. It’s usually not one thing. It’s multiple things are happening at the same time. A good leader integrates all that and says this is happening here, that’s happening here and here, that means we’ve got to go there. You have all these directions but when you put them all together it gives you a point, a focus that you’ve got to move to. I think some people are better at that than others. |
|  | Some people naturally seem to integrate what’s going on around them and find the solution that brings it to the right point and moves the organization forward. Some people, all they can see is the dot. They only see the trees. They never see a forest. We talk about you’ve got to see the forest from the trees. I think they’re both important but if you’re in a forest and all you see is a tree, you’re missing a lot in the business world or in the health world or in the research world. It’s all moving. It’s knowing where the future’s going to be before it happens and then trying to get there first. |
|  | I think that’s another trait that you see in good leaders is they get “it” again. They’re constantly processing what’s happening, what people are saying around them. When they put it all together, it means something and that’s where you go. |
|  | That’s a lot of the story. I like to tell people you don’t have to be Einstein. You have to be smart enough for the job. You’ve got to be smart enough for the job. That’s as smart as IQ and its EQ. they have to combine. High IQ, low EQ, disaster. High EQ and no IQ, that would be a disaster too. Generally, I think, high EQ generally doesn’t get into these positions although occasionally you’ll see some people who are particularly good on their feet. |
|  | The one kind of person I have learned to watch out for are the narcissistic sociopaths. They are really unique people. I’ve run across a few of them in my career. Generally, they’re scary. I’ve learned to see them better. I remember asking a psychiatrist, “How do you guys treat that?” He looked at me and said, “You can’t.” This is a respected person. “What do you do?” “It’s a big work-around. It’s hard.” You realize, oh my gosh, when you have somebody, if they’re on your leadership team, you’ve got a problem. Recognizing that personality disorder and you have all these personalities and trying to manage them. |
|  | That’s another thing that I learned, you have to know yourself pretty well. As you can tell from this interview, I talk too much. I’ve known that forever. Remember the fellow who told me it’s not where you work, it’s who you work for, he said, “Mike, you talk too much. You’re not going to amount to anything.” He’s was right I talk too much but I amounted to something anyhow. Managing that. |
|  | What’s interesting in a situation like this, I’ll talk. You could put me in a room at the National Academy of Sciences with a committee and that’s not what I do. If I’m just going to chat, I’ll chat. If I’m leading something, I’m listening. I’m absorbing as much as I can. I’m assuming that I’m surrounded by people who are smart and smarter than I am and will get all that knowledge together on the table. |
|  | Managing personnel is as important. One of the things that I found useful during my time at Emory was we created a leadership academy. We decide that part of the leadership academy is we better know who we are. I had done some personality profiles when I became a dean. They were interesting. We use what was called the Birkman Personality Profile. It was great. I participated in it. Our leadership academy that we started, everybody had one of these. We had a discussion by the folks who administered the test telling us what the different colors meant. |
|  | We broke the fellows out into sub-groups. Of course, the value was to learn who you are and who other people are and what are the differences in people. Of course, I found out that one of my traits is I’m a doer. Get it done. Get it done now. That’s the red color they give assigned to that. I was a very long red. My CFO has, I think it was yellow, I can’t remember the colors on this one. He’s process oriented. He loves process. I liked working with him because he’s very thorough and good. We’d have these meetings and it would drive me nuts. He’d come in and he’d have a five-page document. It would be numbered one to a gillion. He’d say this is the problem. He’d want to walk me through the entire process of how he got to the conclusion. |
|  | Once I realized my personality and his personality and I laughed when we started talking about it, I said, “Here’s the deal.” I said, “Ronnie,” I said, “You’re terrific at what you do. You’re different than I am and you know that obviously. I probably drive you nuts.” I said, “When you give me a list of your problem and the hundred and fifty steps you took to carefully rationalize your way through to the solution, let’s do this. You tell me the problem and then tell me your solution. If I like your solution, then you can walk me through all hundred and fifty steps how you got there. If I don’t like your solution, I’ll tell you that, then you can go back and dream up another bunch of steps.” We all laughed but it was true. |
|  | I realized from after doing that, people want to walk you through the painstaking steps they got to to get to that conclusion because they love the process. It could drive me nuts. I want, tell me the answer. If it makes sense, we’ll do it. I’m more intuitive in a way than some of the others. There are commutators. This a very helpful thing. Then we put all the whole leadership team did it. We have leadership retreats which I found very valuable, take your top team away. |
|  | One of the things I found in doing this is is that, I started it at Hopkins too, is that you’re going to have a retreat on a topic or topics. You invite your leadership team. It may be fifteen. It may be twenty people. I always bring the families. I try to have the workload be eight to two. From two to six, people are free to do things, go play golf or ride a horse, do family things. Have them interacting. |
|  | Then we come back. Trina’s great about this stuff. She’d plan out the dinner. Of course, she does all the menu. Then she’d always have some kind of entertainment at night. It may be poetry. It may be a couple people doing a play. One time it was Texas hold ‘em. It was fun. Everybody’s out there together, doing things together, chatting. |
|  | You create a family of your leadership team. They get to know each other. They get to know their spouse. They even get to know their children. That breaks down a lot of other barriers too of I’m not out to stab anybody in the back here. I got to know these people. They’re good folks. We all have to perform. If we don’t, that’s a problem because Mike’s already explained that one in his reviews. You’ve got your objections, you better hit them. Everybody gets that. Now, how do we work together? How do we really get the marginal benefit that comes from group thinking where it’s useful? |
|  | I think it’s another piece is you’ve got to build team, a sense of team and how you do that. Below that, you want those people to build their teams. It’s part of it. It costs a little bit of money to do that but that’s peanuts in the big sense of what you’re trying to do as a leader. |
|  | Clear vision, inspiring, strategy, implementation, accountability and fiduciary responsibility. I said I’ve got an easy job. My job is I don’t actually manage anything on a day to day basis as the Executive Vice President. Somebody’s got the hospitals. He oversees them, he’s got people running the hospitals. It goes all the way down. The medical school, the public health school, the nursing schools have got deans, et cetera. I’m this troublemaker who sits up here with a big vision dreaming up big dreams, going out and hustling, trying to make national and international change, driving the force here. |
|  | I always tell my team, my great day is I come to work and do nothing. You’re doing everything. Then I’m successful. You’re successful. The bad news is I never come to work without another idea for us to do. I’ll probably drive you nuts. I’m not going to do your job for you. You’re going to do your job. If I have to do your job then I will take a demotion. I’ll fire you and I’ll come down and they can find somebody to do my job. Once you make those things clear with people, I think you really develop a relationship that’s important and one that’s as open communication and freedom to tell you I think you’re wrong, Mike. That’s okay. If I knew everything, I would be a deity. That’d be great but I don’t. |
|  | I think you want to have people be able to tell you you’re wrong. It goes back to listen and learn. You’re always learning, always learning. I’ve learned all my financial and accounting stuff by on the job training. Finance people come to me and explaining to me how to read a spreadsheet. Look to the lower right corner first. You know what I mean by that. A lot of this is on the job training you get in life. That’s the way life is. You’ve got expertise around you. Take advantage of it and use it. It’s been a fun trip. That’s the direct response. |
|  | The other part is relationships with the outside world and relationships outside your organization. If you’re going to do an acquisition of another group or a hospital or something, part of the relationship building is just as important as the deal and the details of the that deal and being able to go out and participate in a way that’s meaningful. The national presence, it gets back to what Bob Cantrell taught me is you’ve got all your people. You want them to all be leaders of every organization in the country at the same time. It’s not going to happen but you’re pushing your people and promoting them to be nationally visible. If they’re nationally visible, the institution is nationally visible and then making a difference nationally and internationally. |
|  | When I see great ideas coming from the Department of Surgery that says we’re going to create a division of global surgery. I said, “What do you mean?” “We have some of our doctors who really want to go and do a version of missionary work in education as well as care in Ethiopia.” I said, “Really?” They tell me what they’re doing. They have one of their residents who had already spent a year. That’s brilliant. Who else does this? We’re going to train these young doctors in these second, third worlds how to be better at what they do. |
|  | You learn things. I didn’t know at that time in Africa, trauma was the number one cause of death. You think of HIV and all the rest of it. You start thinking about how easy it is for somebody to get killed in an accident there. Trauma surgery was really important. Whether that’s a true number or not, that’s what they told me. It sounded good so I believed it. It was really more about that mission of how are we extending ourselves. |
|  | We’re going to do a clean water program in third worlds. Now we’ve got Emory people out in third worlds making a difference. You look back. I look back and say wow, some of the great things that have happened at Emory have been two drugs that treat HIV, making a difference in tens of millions of lives. Where it was fatal, it’s now turned into a chronic disease. Hepatitis C drug. Dr. Schinazi, a brilliant guy was involved in the HIV. He does the Hep C II. How could a guy be involved in three world class breakthroughs like that? It’s amazing. What a brain. It’s remarkable. |
|  | Emory is now making this international difference as well. In our caring for those Ebola patients and the bravery of our physicians and staff to do something like that when the world really didn’t know what to do. People are dying so frequently and it’s so contagious and we did it so well. I jokingly tell people that’s when everybody in the world started to know that Emory is here in Atlanta and it’s spelled E-M-O-R-Y not E-M-E-R-Y. |
|  | Those are the kind of things that bring national attention to what we do, staying on what I call the penetrating point of the cutting edge. Maybe that’s beginning to get to a good place to close. When I was at Hopkins, I discovered the penetrating point of the cutting edge. Somebody mentioned it to me on some casual way. I was thinking what does that mean, the penetrating point of the cutting edge? Why not just the cutting edge. Then I thought to myself, what’s the cutting edge? Cutting edge is something new. Something new has been invented, discovered, whatever. We are amongst the first to do it. There’s a new technology, a new technique, a new drug and we get to be the first to apply it. Somebody else invented it and we get to apply it. |
|  | The penetrating point is when we discover it and other people follow us. That’s when you are at the top of the game when you’re on the penetrating point of the cutting edge. To me, that’s something that I’ve preached at Emory for my twenty years now is that we’ve got to be on the penetrating point of the cutting edge. This is our century to make a difference. We’re in the right place at the right time and the right environment. Sitting next to the CDC and other things here in town, it’s just all opportunity. An HIV drug that makes a difference, that’s the penetrating point of the cutting edge. |
|  | It’s a way of thinking. How do we encourage that kind of creativity in our people taking the risk and hopefully if you do that, if you hit that penetrating point every now and then, every few years, wow, you’re really making a difference in millions of lives. |
|  | We take care of people in our clinics and our hospitals one by one. In our science, we are affecting people by the tens, the hundreds, the thousands and the millions. That’s what has driven me is that opportunity to understand, answer the question why, to make a difference for the N of one, the individual but for large populations. I think that’s applicable in life to probably anything we do. How do you think that way? Depending where you are in the organization, your focus may be on one part of that, but you own the whole because you’re a part of that organization and need to be proud of it. Then of course, how to communicate that well. |
|  | It’s a challenging but fun and exciting world that has its swings, its ups and downs. You succeed, you fail. You bounce back. You listen. You learn. You decide. You act and then you react and change again because you listened again at where you’re going. You alter the course because the winds changed, the sun didn’t shine, whatever. It’s exciting. Life is exciting in many ways. I can say that I’ve been blessed in that I’m not generally affected by depression nor any of those. I may be a little crazy. I’m a little hyperactive and all that, but that’s been managed, more or less. |
|  | It’s a great life and you learn a lot going through it. I think the excitement is having that enthusiasm for what you do and let it show. Work hard at it. Be creative as you can be. Look for that opportunity to make a difference. Ask the question why. Get “it”. Listen. Learn. Decide. Act. That’s really important. |
|  | I will close. Back when I was a resident in ENT, a lot of what we did was visual. We used to wear head mirrors. Now we use all kinds of scopes. We used to have students, medical students would come in. They would go see the patient in the clinic. Then they’d come back in to see me as the attending doctor or the chief resident. I’d say, “What did you see? Tell me about the patient.” They would tell you why the patient was there and what their problem was and go through all that. I’d say, “Tell me about the physical examination.” They would start to describe. Let’s say they came in and they had a hearing loss. It was acute and whatever. |
|  | After they’d do that they would do they exam, they’d tell me what they saw, the whole examination. I would say a simple question, this would be back in the seventies, “Did they have tonsils.” That was a dumb question because it was irrelevant. Did they have tonsils? So often they would say, “I can’t say.” I’d say, “Did you look?” “Absolutely I looked.” “You looked but didn’t see. Now go back and see.” Then they would come back and say, “No, they had their tonsils taken when they were six.” |
|  | It was interesting how this lesson of look, see. Then you have to know what you see and understand what it means. I used that way back as a resident. I think it applies to leadership as well in a way is that listen, learn, act, do, look, see, know, understand. There was a lot of that in lessons from that that you can take in life, too, and combine those things. |
|  | Anyhow, you learn a lot from your mom and your dad, from hanging out with four other kids, fighting over games and food and whatever else, playing on the streets with kids in a neighborhood, sports; you learn from jobs you get, whether menial jobs like sweeping floors, delivering newspapers, bagging groceries. I’ve done all those things. You learn from all that. It all adds up. It summates in a way in your life if you’re lucky. It means something. Of course, hard work is just the driver. It’s a requirement. It’s not an option. |
|  | I think I’ve told this story now. You too can learn, do all this yourself and enjoy. You don’t just get assigned it. It’s not uncommon have a student come up and say, “How do I get to do what you do?” I say, “Maybe the first this I do is become a professor. You mean do what I do, be Executive Vice President for Health Affairs of a university? You’ve got to become a professor.” “I don’t want to do that.” “Then you won’t be this.” “Why?” I have to explain to them. |
|  | It’s interesting how people, they want to go be the boss right away. How do I skip everything in between? Life doesn’t work that way. It’s a series of steps. You go all the way through and then we move on to the world on the outside, wherever that is. That’s the story. |