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Calling a New Generation of Leaders

William L. White and Lonnetta Albright

A generational passing is unfolding in the world of addiction treatment. The field's long-tenured leaders in policy development, administration, clinical supervision, clinical practice, research, education and training are beginning to disengage. Their mass exodus in the next decade will mark a major milestone in the history of the field. The future of addiction treatment and recovery in America rests on the preparation and willingness of a new generation of leaders to step forward to fill this emerging void.

On behalf of the men and women who are approaching the twilight of their careers in this field, we extend an invitation to the younger readers of *Addiction Professional* to step forward to accept this mantle of leadership. Some readers will feel they are not suited or ready for such responsibility. Most of the leaders from the authors' generation were not ready either when the field asked us to step forward. This essay offers thirteen prescriptions for enhancing such readiness.

Leadership Development Prescriptions

Fully Commit Yourself to the Field: People enter the addictions field through many pathways and remain or leave for equally diverse reasons. The degree of long-term commitment to the field varies from individual to individual and in the same individual over time. The exodus of current leaders opens an era of increased vulnerability and opportunity. A vanguard of new leaders is needed who are committed to the field's future. Might you become a member of this vanguard? Consider the following questions:

- 1) Do I feel in my heart that service to this field is what I am personally destined to do with my life?
- 2) Do I feel there are better ways to respond to the needs of the new generation of clients that are entering addiction treatment?
- 3) Am I willing to commit myself to the future of this field at a level that transcends particular job roles and organizational affiliations?

If your answers to all three questions are affirmative, perhaps it is time to formalize this commitment and intensify your leadership preparation.

Orient Yourself to the Field: A crucial early step in leadership preparation is getting yourself fully oriented to the field. This involves stepping outside your role and your organization to acquire knowledge of:

- The history of the field (White, 1998).
- The core ideas, values and service technologies that distinguish addiction treatment from other human service disciplines (White, 2004).
- The field's organizational infrastructure, including:
 - key federal/state agencies(see <http://www.niaaa.nih.gov>, <http://www.nida.nih.gov>, <http://csat.samhsa.gov>)
 - national trade associations (see <http://www.nasadad.org>, <http://www.naatp.org>, <http://www.adpana.com>, <http://www.asam.org>, and <http://naadac.org>).
 - national program accreditation bodies (see <http://www.jcaho.org/accredited+organizations/behavioral+health+care/index.htm> and <http://www.carf.org>).
 - national addiction counselor trade associations and credentialing bodies (see <http://naadac.org> and <http://www.icrcaoda.org>).
 - national advocacy groups (see <http://ncadd.org> and <http://www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org/main/index.php>).
 - recovery mutual aid societies (http://facesandvoicesofrecovery.org/resources/support_home.php).
- The core people, organizations, ideas and service technologies that are pioneering new approaches to the treatment of women, adolescents, seniors, people of color, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people as well as people recovering from co-occurring medical and psychiatric disorders (see <http://www.nattc.org> and <http://www.treatment.org/Externals/tips.html> for key resources).
- The core people and institutions that shape drug policy and treatment strategy at the federal level (see <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov>).

Leadership preparation requires transcending what may have been a parochial involvement in the field, grasping a vision of the field as a whole, and getting a sense of the state of the field's infrastructure and emerging needs (See McLellan, Carise, & Kleber, 2003 for a recent review of the latter).

Develop a Personal Leadership Vision: Having committed and oriented oneself to the field, the question remains, "Committed to do what?" Aspiring leaders can formulate their own personal leadership vision by exploring six questions:

- 1) What core values and core service technologies of the treatment field need to be protected from future dilution, corruption or abandonment?
- 2) What unmet needs must the field address as it moves into the future?
- 3) How can we best reach the next generation of clients entering addiction treatment?
- 4) What unique assets do I possess that can nurture the future development of the field?
- 5) What issues and activities energize me at the deepest levels?
- 6) What major contributions or lasting legacy would I like to leave the field by the end of my career?

A personal leadership vision can be formulated out of the intersection of the emerging needs of the field, what we do best, and those issues about which we are most passionate.

Study the Great Leaders: The best leaders do their homework—not only on technical subjects but also on the art of leadership itself. We recommend three kinds of reading as leadership preparation. We recommend the biographies and autobiographies of people who have left a positive imprint on the world, such as Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Tatanka Yotanka (Sitting Bull), Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr., Cesar Chavez, and Mother Teresa. We recommend the biographies or writings of recovery mutual aid pioneers (e.g., Bill Wilson and Jean Kirkpatrick), treatment pioneers (e.g., Dan Anderson and Marie Nyswander), science-to-practice advocates (e.g., William Miller and Tom McLellan), and public education and policy pioneers (e.g., Marty Mann and Harold Hughes). Finally, we recommend broader works on leadership. Ask leaders you admire what they have read that has inspired and guided them.

Expect Obstacles: Being a leader is not easy. Many obstacles will divert you from your leadership vision. You must face and overcome those rising from inside you—fear, reluctance, procrastination, and a sense of unworthiness (to name a few)—and those obstacles the world injects. Working your way through these roadblocks builds the courage, discipline and strength of character you will need as a leader. No one becomes a leader without being tested.

Expand Your Educational and Experiential Credentials: Once you have formulated a personal leadership vision, you can identify the new knowledge and skills you will need to acquire. The opportunities for career advancement in the next decade in the addiction field will be enormous, but many of today's workers will be thrust into positions for which they are unprepared. Now is the window of opportunity for such preparation. If you have considered advancing your educational/professional credentials or receiving specialized training, now is the time. For those seeking specialty training in addiction studies, a national directory of these programs can be found at <http://www.nattc.org/degrees/search.asp>. Questions to consider in this credential building process include the following:

- 1) What specialty degree or training will most empower me to fulfill my personal leadership plan?
- 2) What educational and training resources are geographically and financially accessible to me?
- 3) To what extent will my current employer support my continued education?

There is also a level of experiential knowledge that will enhance your future as a leader in addiction treatment. Many of us have risen through the ranks within particular types of programs that provided great depth of experience but were limited in their scope. Answering the following questions can help identify such limitations.

- 1) What organizational settings (rural, urban, suburban) have I not worked within?
- 2) What treatment philosophies and modalities do I need to understand more fully?
- 3) With what client populations am I least familiar, e.g., adolescents, women, and people with co-occurring disorders?
- 4) Are there particular ethnic cultures about which my knowledge and direct experience is limited?

Deficiencies can be rectified via new jobs or job assignments or arranging orientation visits or brief internships within programs that will broaden your experience.

Actively Participate in Professional Associations: One of the things that distinguishes true leaders is their ability to rise above personal and institutional interests to represent the broader needs of the field and its service constituents. One way of transcending these parochial interests is activism within professional associations. If you aspire to be a leader in the treatment field, it is time you became active in one or more of these associations. Consider the following questions:

- 1) What national, state or local professional associations have the greatest potential influence on the future of addiction treatment and recovery in America?
- 2) What associations have current or potential influence on those issues about which I am most concerned?
- 3) How could I influence these associations in the coming years?

Cultivate Professional Mentors: Cultivating mentorship relationships with existing leaders is a particularly effective method of leadership preparation. Such mentorship experiences can vary from the very focused and time-limited to those that evolve into sustained professional collaborations. As you explore the development of a mentorship network, consider the following questions:

- 1) If you could receive focused education and professional guidance from any existing leaders, whom would you choose? (Remember, the Internet has eliminated problems of geographical access.)
- 2) What would you most want from these individuals? (Be as specific as possible.)
- 3) Is there a logical sequence of your work with these individuals, e.g., learning from one that would prepare you for work with another?

Participate in Formal Leadership Development Institutes: Leading organizations within the addictions treatment field are recognizing the coming leadership crisis and are responding with a variety of leadership development and succession planning initiatives. These efforts include formal leadership development institutes that recruit aspiring leaders and provide structured training and mentorship opportunities. Participation in a leadership development institute can be an intensely stimulating and rewarding experience. CSAT-funded Addiction Technology Transfer Centers (<http://www.nattc.org/leaderInst/index.htm>), state addiction treatment agencies, addiction studies programs and private foundations have launched leadership development institutes. Contact your state agency or regional ATTC to identify leadership development programs in your area (See <http://www.nattc.org/regCenters.html> for a listing of the ATTCs).

Build Networks of Influence: Leadership is the strategic use of one's self and one's sphere of relational influences to affect the world. Aspiring leaders build relational networks within their own organization, within the larger field and within the field's operating environment. Network building and maintenance are arts and skills that take a lifetime to fully develop. Those leaders with the greatest long-term impact on their fields often develop this capacity early in their careers. The multiple purposes of network building by aspiring leaders include gaining access to and influence upon those already in positions of power, opening leadership opportunities and creating networks of people who can act in concert to influence treatment policies and funding. In light of the importance of this dimension, consider the following questions:

- 1) Where are my relational networks weakest: inside my own organization, inside the communities I serve, inside the larger field of addiction treatment or inside the field's larger political and cultural environment?

- 2) What relationships are at risk of falling from my network due to lack of maintenance on my part?
- 3) What key relationships do I need to develop in order to extend my sphere of influence?

Recognize and Manage Toxic Personal and Organizational Processes: Leadership evolves in tandem with one's own personal development and in the context of evolving political, economic, cultural and organizational processes. Aspiring leaders need to recognize windows of vulnerability (developmental crises, personal impairment, lapses in one's ethical guidance system) that can lead to falls from grace. (All leaders are prone to the Curse of Icarus: a plunging fall to earth following infatuation with oneself and one's achievements and power.) It is also important to recognize toxic organizational processes that can weaken one's integrity and undermine the health of one's organization. There are also cultural processes within stigmatized groups that contribute to the internal scapegoating of organizational leaders and the sabotage of such leaders by culturally dominant institutions. Aspiring leaders should become students of such organizational and cultural processes. We would recommend studies of the rise and fall of the most historically notable treatment institutions (and their leaders), including the conflict-ridden demise of the New York State Inebriate Asylum (Crowley & White, 2004), the implosion of Synanon (Janzen, 2001), and the over-extension and financial collapse of Parkside Medical Services (White, 1998).

Strengthen Your Health and Character: Leadership demands exerting sustained pressure that can compromise one's physical, emotional and relational health. Such pressure can also magnify minor character defects in ways that can wound individuals, organizations and the larger field (Remember the Curse of Icarus.). Successful leaders consciously protect and enhance their health and cultivate rituals of daily living that strengthen their personal character. Such activities include:

- cultivating daily habits of health maintenance,
- balancing one's professional and personal life,
- developing decompression rituals that smooth the transition between work and home,
- using time-out periods for physical, emotional and spiritual renewal,
- building and nurturing one's family and social replenishment network,
- maintaining centering rituals that keep one focused on life priorities (value-focused reading, prayer, meditation, self-reflection),
- developing rituals of interaction with kindred spirits (people who share your aspiration values), and
- participating in unpaid acts of service to the community.

Conduct Yourself as a Role Model: The leader's day-to-day behaviors exemplify or undermine the aspirational values of his or her organization and the larger field. To aspire to leadership is to accept a mantle of responsibility to conduct one's life in a way that elevates those around us. Such a responsibility entails:

- eliminating excessive and toxic behaviors (e.g., smoking),
- sustaining respectful, nurturing, non-exploitive relationships in our personal and professional lives, and
- exhibiting a high level of ethical sensitivity and skills in ethical decision-making (See Bissell & Royce, 1987; White & Popovits, 2001).

Create a Personal Leadership Plan: Leadership can happen by happenstance or by design. We recommend creating a personal leadership plan that integrates many of the potential activities identified above and prioritizes and sequences them. This plan should answer two basic questions:

- 1) What type of role do I want to be serving within the field five years from now?
- 2) What are the steps I need to take to reach that goal?

The purpose of such a plan is to provide purpose and direction to your professional life. Your plan will require regular revision as your goals become more refined and as the world decides to close some doors and open others for you. Many leaders look back and see careers that more closely resemble improvised jazz than scored music, and yet they see a thread of order in the milestones of their careers that set the stage for their ultimate contributions to the field.

Continually Re-assess Yourself: Constantly self-evaluate yourself and ask people who you trust and admire for their candid opinions about your evolving capabilities and performance. What you are looking for is not flattery but feedback that is honest, brutally specific and useful. Most leaders have a zone of effectiveness, and regularly drift toward or beyond the boundaries of this zone. Self-assessment and feedback activities constitute an important professional guidance system. Successful leaders have the ability to utilize these activities to re-engineer themselves several times over the course of their careers.

Study and Engage the Next Generation: The best leaders study and engage the generations below them. They leave a living legacy through their influence on those they have developed. (They also learn a great deal from those coming behind them.) Look closely to see if you can spot the bright and rising stars around you. Who should you be taking with you on your leadership journey?

Tentative Steps

For those early in your career or at a point of mid-career re-evaluation, the move toward leadership can begin with small acts: joining or becoming more active in a professional association, subscribing to a journal that will help you stay abreast of developments in the field, using the Internet to connect with the larger currents and debates in the field, reading some of the field's classic or new texts, visiting or volunteering at a program other than where you work, making a professional presentation, or authoring a journal article.

An Invitation

Two closing points are warranted given the number of the above prescriptions. First, no leader ever fully achieves their optimum level of knowledge, sensitivity, and skill, nor do they perfectly apply the assets they possess. Second, while the burdens of leadership may seem excessive, they are offset by the deep satisfaction that leadership in this field can bring.

The ultimate goal of the addiction treatment field is to provide a portal of entry into the world of recovery and to prepare individuals and families for the long-term recovery process. Witnessing the miracles of individual and family recovery and knowing one played a role in such transformations are among the most sacred experiences in this field. Assuring that these miracles continue is worth the burden of leadership. The authors' generation is about to pass the torch of leadership. Are you prepared and ready to accept it? The clock is ticking.

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