

Through the generosity of Charles R. Millikan, D. Min., vice president for Spiritual Care and Values Integration, an annual award competition was established at Houston Methodist Hospital among the resident staff. To enter the writing competition, residents must submit a poem or essay of 1,000 words or less on the topic, "On Being a Doctor." A committee of seven was selected from Houston Methodist Hospital Education Institute to establish the judging criteria and select the winning entries. The following is the second-place winning entry for 2014; the third-place winning entry will be published in the next issue of this journal.



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WORTH FOLLOWING

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With his heart skipping beats and palms oozing sweat, the nervous intern awaited the fury of angry words and sullen disappointment that was sure to soon rain down on him from his attending surgeon as they exited a patient's room. In his eagerness to join surgery in the operating room, he had forgotten to place some key orders for this patient and see them to completion, now surely extending the patient's stay in the hospital. He had failed his team, his chief, his attending, and most importantly, his patient. The young trainee realized his mistake only moments before his mentor, and all too late to avoid the impending repercussions. But as the assault neared its end and he was about to offer a meager apology and promise that it would never happen again, he was shocked to hear his chief resident beat him to the punch, confidently stating his own apology and his own promise. Like a death row inmate receiving an unexpected pardon, he stood frozen for an extra count after the exchange, still trying to understand what had just happened. *He took my bullet*, he thought...*but why would he take a bullet meant for me?* Surely he would receive just reprimand from his chief later, but his reputation had effectively been salvaged.

A valuable clinical lesson was learned indeed, but perhaps more importantly, an invaluable example was witnessed and the bar set very high. This was my experience as an intern during my first few weeks of training, and the first of many exhibits of true leadership from a chief resident whom I now call a great friend and try to emulate as I ascend the clinical ranks.

As a physician, the daily grind is fraught with obstacles waiting to take you down. One such obstacle is pressure—exerted both externally from society and internally from within ourselves—to function without error. As surgeons, we sense this pressure more than most, as mistakes in our craft can have the highest of costs. If you're not careful, such an environment can breed dishonesty, backstabbing, and a moral depravity that can spread like wildfire; and the torch that is passed down the line within medical teams is not one you would ever want lighting your path. The most

effective leaders fight the temptation to fall victim to this pressure by maintaining selfless service, an exhaustive work ethic, and consistency of character as tenets of their everyday practice. But most of all, true leadership is defined not with words but with actions. I've found that it is most often the toughest of times when leaders emerge. After all, anyone can hold the helm when the sea is calm, but it takes someone with true grit to hold steady when oceans rage.

So what is true leadership? Too often in today's society it has become a buzzword in a boardroom or paint on a billboard, stripped of all meaning. Too often our youth are inundated in the media by examples of people who couldn't find true leadership with a 10-foot pole. Perhaps to make true leaders of the future, we need to look to the past. American author, speaker, and pastor John Maxwell states, "A good leader is a person who takes a little more than his share of the blame and a little less than his share of the credit"—a definition that my former chief exemplified. WWII British military commander Bernard Montgomery tells us it is "the capacity and the will to rally men and women to a common purpose and the character which inspires confidence." But what is leadership made of? Dwight D. Eisenhower, former U.S. president and five-star Army general, tells us that "the supreme quality of leadership is integrity." Max De Pree, CEO of Herman Miller Inc., says, "The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between, the leader is a servant." Andre Malreux, France's first Minister of Cultural Affairs, agreed, saying, "The command is to serve, nothing more and nothing less."

All of these people were inspiring leaders themselves, and I believe their views on leadership ring true as much today as they did the day they were spoken. They share a common thread in their simplicity. I pray every night with my children that they would become leaders. I ask simply that they would "be someone worth following." Perhaps that is the simplest definition of leadership. I only hope to be a husband, a father, a friend, and a physician...worth following.