
ATTITUDES ARE CONTAGIOUS

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That was the ride of an editorial I wrote for *the Journal of the American College of Cardiology* several years ago when serving as the ACC's 40th president. The article was dedicated to, and prompted by, a remarkable man whose life and philosophy were intricately woven into the fabric of the ACC. His influence over me, his colleagues and peers, and the organization for which he worked left an indelible and permanent imprint. I think it's worth reflecting upon how attitudes affect our lives and our work, particularly in light of changes that are taking place in the milieu of The Methodist Hospital.

Think about the accribures of those in your personal and professional lives who have most influenced your decisions. Likely, they lived a steadfast life and professed an upbeat philosophy imbued with compassion and perhaps a stern or even rigid personality: not always right, but never in doubt, has been said of some. I learned the value of attitude when—as an 18-year-old lad in the U.S. Naval Corps school in San Diego, during World War II—I was told I would have a choice of assignment if I graduated in the top 10 percent of my class. The other 90 percent would be assigned to the Marines, who were landing on islands all over the South Pacific at that time and suffering significant casualties—especially among corpsmen. In my mind's eye instantly came unpleasant visions of those islands; I also wanted to see more in life than my naval service. That 10 percent goal became my beacon and determination. It taught me that attitude sets the tone for our lives and reminds

me of the story we all knew in childhood of *The Little Engine That Could*.

The power of a positive attitude has influenced lives of every successful individual from time immemorial. As a medical resident, I was fortunate to spend time with two remarkable physicians who both happened to be cardiologists and who left their imprint upon my life and career. One taught me humility whenever I thought I had all the answers, yet his lessons were never delivered in a derogatory manner. He always put a positive spin on my miscalculations. The other taught me compassion (if that is a teachable, rather than an inheritable trait). When I naively spoke of seeing, too often, too many "crocks" on the ward (an unflattering characterization of grumpy, older, long-time hospitalized patients, usually with a chronic illness—a term no longer acceptable in medical lexicon), he spiritedly and pointedly showed me how one could learn something every day from every patient, even if they had been there for weeks. Drs. Louis A. Soloff and Jacob Zatuschni have remained by my side in spirit now for nearly 50 years, needling me and prodding me to do it right.

When college students ask me about the future of medicine and whether it is a profession they should consider, or whether I would do it over again if given a choice, my answer has never wavered. It is among the most noble and finest of professions, so long as it is understood that it commands a philosophy of service. Of course I would do so again,

even faced with the social, financial and legal changes that have and are taking place. There have been few occasions in my professional life when I have not looked forward with excitement and anticipation of the new day. New challenges, exciting experiences, wide-ranging emotions provide food for the ego and enrich the brain. Medicine is a challenge, but what more worthy a challenge? That brings me to what prompted this discourse.

The Methodist DeBakey Heart Center is central to a new and exciting undertaking of The Methodist Hospital — an organizational concept in evolution. Cardiology and Cardiovascular Surgery, which historically have been sections in their respective departments of medicine and surgery, are now stand-alone departments within the heart center program, each with its own fiscal line, department chair and administration. In the near future, construction will begin on a new hospital building to house these new departments and all other activities of the Methodist DeBakey Heart Center. This concentration of resources from many disparate sources is designed to improve the delivery of care and outcomes for our cardiovascular patients, and to enhance our already well-established leadership role in cardiovascular medicine. I congratulate those with the foresight, courage and "attitude" to move this concept forward. To the Methodist DeBakey Heart Center, I offer my support and echo the expressive philosophy of the Home Depot advertisement which states, "You can do it. We can help."