Ten

Public Health Leadership Attributes

…Success in a flatter, more distributed and collaborative world will require a new generation of leaders in public health with new mindsets, an appetite for innovation and interdisciplinary collaboration and a strong dose of political savvy.[1]

—J. R. Kimberly

Introduction

Public health is a constantly evolving field, with new challenges and new forces that necessitate agility and creativity to protect our communities. High performance and flexibility are not just useful attributes. They are daily survival requirements for public health. Public health has added to its capacity to evolve quickly and adapt in a changing environment.[2]

Recent developments in the field have highlighted that public health leaders should:[3]

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[1] Kimberly, J. R. (2011). Preparing leaders in public health for success in a flatter, more distributed and collaborative world. Public Health Reviews, 33(1), 289–299.

[2] The Public Health Leadership Society, the National Public Health Leadership Development Network, and the National Public Health Leadership Institute. (2009). Now more than ever: The case for public health leadership programs. Presented to the leadership of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, p. 2. Retrieved from www.phls.org/CMSuploads/ Now_More_Than_Ever-83499.pdf/.

[3] See, Association of Schools of Public Health (ASPH) Education Committee: Master's degree in public health core competency development

- Demonstrate transparency, integrity, and honesty in all actions
- Apply social justice and human rights principles when addressing community needs
- Engage in dialogue and learning from others to advance public health goals

These are discussed in the second, third, and fourth sections.

Integrity, Honesty, and Transparency

When asked, what was the most important characteristic people sought in their leaders, integrity was by far considered the most important.[4] Followers need to trust their leaders to do what is in their best interest. Therefore, leaders need to lead with integrity and honesty.

Integrity and honesty are guided by personal and organizational values. Each leader needs to define his/her values and organizations should define and commit to their values. There can be many potential values that one could choose. So, there is a need to prioritize them and find basic values that will determine most of the other values.

Values need to be emphasized again and again in terms of conversations, actions, and dialogues within the organization.

Webster's Dictionary defines integrity as firm adherence to a code of values or the quality or state of being complete or undivided. Integrity means consistent behavior that matches the values system a person or organization has. Trust is created when leaders "walk the talk" and model the values in difficult circumstances. Maintaining integrity and honesty guided by values by a leader will result in these qualities permeating within the organization.[5]

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project, Version 2.3. Retrieved from http://srph.tamhsc.edu/health-policy-mgmt/master-of-public-health/mph-competencies.html/.

[4] Covey, S. (2005). *The 8th habit: From effectiveness to greatness*. Free Press.

[5] Retrieved from www.corneliusassoc.com/.

Human resources management has a critical role to play in creating a culture of integrity and honesty.[6]

1. Recruit new employees with a concern for integrity
2. Model integrity in selection, appraisal, promotion, and other rewards within the organization
3. Discipline the transgressors

Transparency is not an act, it is a process. A leader or an organization that strives for transparency not only does not hide anything, but also proclaims that "we are proud of what we do and how we function." This is only possible if the leaders and their organizations have integrity and honesty. Transparency, on the other hand, also supports integrity and honesty.

Stephen Covey[7] says that just as trust is the key to all relationships, so also is trust the glue to all organizations. It is the cement that holds the bricks together. Trust is the fruit of trustworthiness of people and their organizations. The trust comes from three sources: personal, institutional, and one person consistently choosing to give it to another—an act that leads one to feel another's belief that one can add value. Trust is a verb AND a noun. When it is both a verb and a noun, it is something shared and reciprocated between people. That is the essence of how a person becomes the leader or their boss. They merit trust by giving it. A trustworthy organization will keep its promises. People will do what they say and they will do it consistently.

Without integrity, trust is never achieved. The best leaders are transparent: they do what they say; they "walk the talk." Therefore, people believe them. Integrity comes from a strong sense of values. Behaving with integrity also means being consistent with one's choices and actions.

Integrity requires personal courage to uphold the values in benign as well as difficult circumstances.[8] Principle-centered leadership is often accompanied by a strong sense of humility

[6] Retrieved from www.johnbaldoni.com/.
[7] Covey, S. (2005). *The 8th Habit: From effectiveness to greatness*.
[8] Ibid.

and courage which has integrity at its heart. The power, wisdom, and guidance for a leader increase as these principles are applied.

Leaders in the public health sector need to adhere to the highest level of integrity and ethics in their behavior. Their honesty must apply to their dealings with public, colleagues in their organizations, collaborating partners, and the media.

The key to high performance is for integrity to be part of a leader's day-to-day actions and thinking, not just when big decisions are needed but even when small ordinary ones have implications for or impact on someone.

Social Justice, Health Equity, and Human Rights

The three fields of social justice, health equity, and human rights have different fundamental concepts, perspectives, languages, and tools of action; but have many points of intersection.[9]

Social Gradient

In arguing for closing the gap in health disparities and life opportunities within a generation (30 years), the Commission on Social Determinants of Health (CSDH) says that in countries at all levels of income, health follows a *social gradient*—that is, the lower the socioeconomic position, the worse the health. Putting these inequities right—the huge and remediable differences between and within the countries—is a matter of social justice (see Box 10.1).[10]

Health equity is determined not only by the social determinants of health—conditions of daily life and inequitable distribution

[9] Braveman, P. (2010). Social conditions, health equity and human rights. *Journal of Health and Human Rights*, 12, 31–48. Retrieved from www.hhrjournal.org/.

[10] Chapman, A. (2010). The social determinants of health, health equity, and human rights. *Journal of Health and Human Rights*, 12, 17–30. Retrieved from www.hhrjournal.org/.

Box 10.1: *Social Gradient in Health*

> The poor health of the poor, the social gradient in health within countries, and the marked health inequities between countries are caused by the unequal distribution of power, income, goods, and services, globally and nationally, the consequent unfairness in the immediate, visible circumstances of people's lives—their access to health care, schools, and education, their conditions of work and leisure, their homes, communities, towns, or cities—and their chances of leading a flourishing life. This unequal distribution of health-damaging experiences is not in any sense a "natural" phenomenon but is the result of a toxic combination of poor social policies and programs, unfair economic arrangements, and bad politics. Together, the structural determinants and conditions of daily life constitute the social determinants of health and are responsible for a major part of health inequities between and within countries.

Source: CSDH, Closing the gap in a generation: Health equity through action on the social determinants of health: Final report of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health. (Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization, 2008). Retrieved from http://www.who.int/social/._determinants/final_report/en.

of power, money, and resources, gender, poverty, and social exclusion—but also by other determinants of health such as safe water, adequate sanitation, adequate nutritious food and housing, healthy occupational and environmental conditions, and access to health-related education and information. The public health leaders need to understand the relative role of various determinants of health in the context—place and time—where they are working.

While social gradient is said to lead to health gradient, the reverse relationship has not been investigated in as much depth as the former. The issue at hand is—how much the impact of social injustice can be mitigated by policies in fields such as water and sanitation, food security, targeted nutrition interventions, and primary health care. Often it is argued that even when such policies and programs are in place, better-off people tend to benefit more than those who are needier. Nevertheless, it could be argued that health equity indicators can be a measure of social inequities in a society.

Rights-Based Approach

On the human rights side, Article 12.2 (b) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights[11] enumerated the following four steps to be taken by the State parties to achieve the full realization of the "highest attainable standard of physical and mental health":

1. The provision for the reduction of the stillbirth rate and of infant mortality, and for the healthy development of the child
2. The improvement of all aspects of environmental and industrial hygiene
3. The prevention, treatment, and control of epidemic, endemic, occupational, and other diseases
4. The creation of conditions which would assure to all medical service and medical attention in the event of sickness

A rights-based approach including treatment of underlying determinants of health in the approach tends to identify the state's obligations and assesses the extent to which they are fulfilled. In this approach, people are not beneficiaries but "claim holders" and the service providers are "duty bearers."

The approach to the underlying determinants by members of the human rights community tends to be narrower both in concept and emphasis from the role that social determinants play in the CSDH report. While health system is an important factor in human rights considerations, the CSDH report treats it as one of the social determinants.

There is a difference in health inequalities versus health inequities. Inequality in health cannot differentiate health outcomes independent of any assessment of cause or fairness. On the other

[11] U.N. General Assembly, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. (1966). United Nations, Treaty Series, Vol. 993, p. 3, December 16. Retrieved from http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae6b36c0.html/.

hand, CSDH says,[12] "Where systematic differences in health are judged to be avoidable by reasonable action globally and within society they are, quite simply, unjust. It is this that we label health inequity."

Generally, health equity can be considered from four dimensions:[13]

- *Universal access to health care*
  Many countries do not have financial resources to pay for effective health systems delivering comprehensive health services, including preventive services to all its citizens. In addition, other barriers—informational, social, and physical—also operate to detract from universal access.
- *NCDs*
  While universal access to health care and preventive public health services, including water and sanitation, can address many communicable diseases and there is some success on that front, NCDs have emerged as a major threat. It is estimated that by 2020, NCDs will be responsible for 60 percent of sickness worldwide and seven deaths in every 10. Most will be in the developing world. Generally, the risk factors are the results of rich diets, lack of physical activity, alcohol, and tobacco use although poor may also suffer as a result of infection, inadequate food, pollution, and lack of basic health care.
- *Role of community*
  Strong advocacy is needed within the communities if health is to be prioritized. Among populations most vulnerable to illness, capacity for effective grassroots action rests on approaches that build local capacity not only to access

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[12] CSDH. (2008). *Closing the gap in a generation: Health equity through action on the social determinants of health: Final report of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization. Retrieved from http://www.who.int/social_determinants/final_report/en/.

[13] Summarized from editorials of Volume 13 of *Journal of Health and Human Rights*. Retrieved from www.hhr.org/.

health care and other services but also to address other determinants of health.

• *Settings of natural disasters and emergencies*
  Rights-based frameworks can offer considerable advantage to ensure health services in such situations.

The emphasis in human rights is on equality of dignity, legal standing, and legal status, and not equality in social or economic position. The former may not necessarily lead to the later and possibly even vice versa. Nondiscrimination as human rights can be an important measure for health equity.

The areas of convergence and complimentarity between social justice, health equity, and human rights are substantial although their nature of concerns, approaches, and emphasis vary.

The public health leaders concerned with health equity need to pay closer attention to social determinants of health and underlying social injustices and be prepared to use legal human rights enshrined in human rights framework to influence them (see Figure 10.1).

Figure 10.1: *Social Justice, Human Rights, and Health Equity*
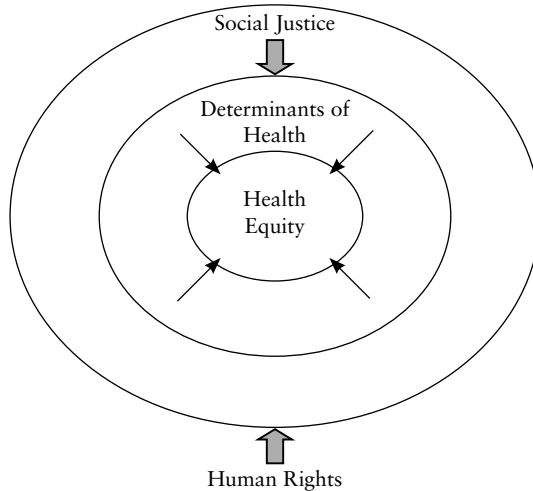
Source: Authors.

Dialogue and Learning

Public health leaders need to keep up with the rapidly changing and increasing complexity of the public health field. Therefore, they need to continue to learn. They would need to receive feedback and solicit new ideas from a diversity of stakeholders. The vital sources of information would include people and community leaders, leaders of other health institutions, professionals working in other related sectors, researchers, and politicians. They can seek the feedback in a variety of ways—through direct and indirect contacts, social networking, surveys, and interpersonal dialogues.

> *The leader of the past was a person who knew what to tell. The leader of the future will be a person who knows how to ask.*
> (Peter Drucker)[14]

The public health agencies need to become learning organizations.[15] The learning organization will need leaders who will continuously learn. Peter Drucker said that individuals have different styles of learning—through listening, reading, and through observation, experience, and reflection.[16] They need to identify a mix of their styles and organize their learning.

However, there is a possibility of information overload. Therefore, leaders need to prioritize. On their personal leadership journey, they can identify a few (one to three) key areas that they seek to improve, prepare an action plan, implement, and follow-up with coworkers to see if improvements have taken place.

In conclusion, public health leaders of the future will have to learn, change, and grow on the job. They will need to reach out to multiple stakeholders, ask for inputs, respond in a positive manner, and implement action plans. Through this iterative process, they will become more effective.

[14] Retrieved from www.marshallgoldsmithlibrary.com/cim/.

[15] Senge, P. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. New York, USA: Doubleday.

[16] Drucker, P. (2005). Managing oneself. *Harvard Business Review*, *83*(1), 100–109.

Effective Dialogue as a Means of Learning

Dialogue is a spoken conversation or written exchange between two or more people. For effective dialogue, there has to be mutual respect and willingness to actively listen to other participants. It requires the following:

- *Participation from both sides*. Dialogue recognizes that people have different perspectives, viewpoints, knowledge, and skill sets. These need to be respected.
- *Freedom*. Dialogues are not to be conducted under coercion or threat.
- *Valued contribution*. Each participant should value the benefit they will derive through the dialogue.

A public health leader would need to have the ability to dialogue with community, stakeholders in health sector and other sectors that have substantial bearing on their work and mission.

When effective dialogue takes place, both parties experience change and can participate in adaptive work of change through collaboration discussed in Chapter 12. Dialogue creates trust, understanding, and empathy for others' positions.

Stephen Covey says that "you should understand first and then seek to be understood." He recommends that you should articulate positions and views of other parties and seek confirmation that you have understood them correctly. The other participant could repeat the same process. Thus, increased understanding will not only remove sources of misunderstanding and conflict, but also result in better ways to address issues.

Thus, dialogue will

- be useful to increase trust, reduce conflicts, and enhance mutual understanding
- lead to creating shared interests and willingness to address common problems
- generate creative ways to address problems through collective action

Effective Listening

For a leader, it is important to listen well to (and posing appropriate questions to) his/her followers, subordinates, and peers, not only to get information but also to establish or strengthen interpersonal relationships. For the speaker, it is a positive feeling when he/she gets a sense of not only being heard but also understood. The power of effective listening is in the hands of the leader.

What is effective listening? Effective listening comes from a combination of active listening and good questioning. Active listening and good questioning act to encourage open communication of ideas and feelings between two parties—the listener and the speaker.

Here are some useful tips given in Tables 10.1 and 10.2.

Table 10.1: *Tips for Active Listening*

	Your Tools	*Action*	*Reasoning*
Active Listening	Your eyes	Look at the person who is speaking	This shows you are interested in what he/she is saying and also that you understand.
	Your body	Be aware of what your body is telling the other person	The body has a nonverbal language of its own and it can convey messages from openness and friendliness to hostility and aloofness. How does your body behave when you are listening to someone? As a leader, you want your body language to show that you are open and welcoming of the speaker's message.
	Emotional vibes	Nonverbal communi-cation	It is not difficult to get a sense of the emotional vibes the speaker is sending you. Is what he/she is saying being said in a calm, smooth manner or in an excited, agitated manner? And what does that tell you about the speaker?
	Reflection	Summarizing what you have heard	It is useful to pause at appropriate moments to summarize the main points of what you have heard. This tells the speaker that you have been paying attention and have understood what was said.

Source: Adapted from several sources.

Table 10.2: *Tips for Good Questioning*

	Types	Example
Good Questioning	Open-ended questions	An example is: "What was the meeting like?" not "Did you go to the meeting?"
	Probing questions	"What do you mean by women not being able to use the clinic?"
	Clarifying questions	"Do you mean that services are underused due to location of clinic or the hours of operations?"
	Ask for personal views and feelings	"What do you think of the way the new counseling service for adolescents was introduced into the area?"
	Ask for (and give) feedback	Ask for feedback after group work or discussion to assess whether the work or discussion has been productive or completed satisfactorily.

Source: Adapted from several sources.

Exercise

Identify a person who you think is a good listener. Observe how he/she listens to other people and list down five characteristics.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

The principle of silence is important for improving listening skills. Some actions include:

✓ Pause a few seconds before answering someone.
✓ Accept silence as a normal part of conversation.
✓ Work to balance speaking and listening time during conversation.
✓ Break eye contact for a moment to allow the other party to feel comfortable with silence.

Exercise

→ Practice the above actions with five people you speak in the office for a week.
- How do you see their reaction and response to you?
- Has it improved the quality of the conversation and information you received?

How to Listen Effectively[17]

An unwillingness to listen is too common among the host of poor leaders we have to put up with. And nearly 60 percent of all management problems stem from faulty communications.

Leaders have to learn to touch the hearts of people before they can ask for their hand. In the workplace, the manager has to first know what's in the heart of his/her people, and listening to them enables this. When the manager listens, he/she connects with those people, and learns of their joys and concerns.

- *Listen to your followers*. Follow this piece of advice from a British Earl, Philip Stanhope: "Many a man would rather you heard his story than granted his request." Good leaders do more than conduct business when they interact with their people—they take time to get to know their people, a feel for each as a person. As managers, you want to be the kind that people want to follow. If you are in the habit of listening only to the facts and not the person who expresses them, you are strongly advised to change your focus—take time to listen to your people.
- *Listen to your customers*. Whether you are running a business, a service, or an administration, you have customers to deal with. These people represent your greatest opportunity

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[17] Appleby, D. (2003). Article in *New Straits Times* (Malaysian newspaper), Appointments Section, January 25, 2003.

and they should be your priority at all times. Unhappy customers should always be a concern. If you are caught up in your own ideas and fail to listen to their concerns, complaints, and suggestions, you will be in trouble. The American Red Indian Tribe Cherokee have a wonderful saying, "Listen to the whispers and you won't have to listen to the screams."

- *Listen to your competitors*. This might seem odd at first. As a leader, you don't want to base your actions on what the other guy is doing, but you should still listen and learn what you can improve upon. Larry King, the American television talk show icon, puts his thoughts across plaintively when he remarks, "I remind myself every morning: nothing I say this day will teach me anything. So if I am going to learn, I must do it by listening." King does not make the mistake of others, who see other organizations as competition and focus their attention on building and championing their own cause, to the extent they forget to learn what the other group is doing.

- *Listen to your mentors*. No leader is so advanced or experienced that he/she can dispense with a mentor. You are always learning from observing and listening to leaders who have more experience than yourself. If you do not have a mentor, you should go out and identify one to be there for you. While you get the process going, begin by reading the success stories of others—sports and media personalities, bureaucrats and businessmen, politicians and statesmen, scientists and philosophers.

Improving on Your Listening

Are you a good listener or are you too busy doing your own thing? When was the last time you really paid attention to people and listened to what they have to say? Do more than just grab

the main points, start listening to not only their words but also their feeling, meanings, and undercurrents, if any.

- *Change your schedule.* As mentioned, spend more time listening to your followers, customers, competitors, and mentors. Give them more attention and on a regular basis—daily, weekly, or monthly.
- *Meet people on their own turf.* A key to being a good listener is to find a common ground with people, whether they are your employees or customers. It is a good practice to discipline yourself to ask at least four to five questions about the individual as a person whenever you meet up—this way you get to know the person better. And seek common ground to cement your connection with him/her.
- *Read between the lines.* As you interact with people, pay attention and listen closely to both the factual and emotional content of their conversation. Sometimes by listening and reading between the lines, you begin to know what is really going on. Try listening with your heart.