



Your Choice, Your Future

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“To learn to work is to train our imagination that we can feel the stimulus from distant futures... In all work and all education the worker should be in touch with his distant source of interest, else he is being trained to slavery, not to self government and self respect.”

– Dr. Richard Cabot
What Men Live By, 1914

Choice making and future focusing requires personal leadership. A leader is a person who is willing and able to influence behavior – his own and that of others. Leadership is the development of vision and strategies, the development and empowerment of individuals to make the vision happen, despite obstacles and conflict.

Management, on the other hand, involves keeping the current systems operating through planning, organizing, staffing, controlling, and problem solving. Leadership works through people and culture. Management works through hierarchy and systems. Leadership tends to use the right side of the brain, management the left.

As dentists, we feel more comfortable on the left side of the brain when, in reality, we need to become very good at integrating both sides in our choice making and future focusing.

The distinction between leadership and management is neither semantic nor insignificant. It is enormously important in creating your preferred future, though at times a source of great confusion. The person, who believes management is leadership, will “manage change” by keeping it under control and be unable to make the larger, more difficult leaps required to pursue what Cabot referred to as the “distant source of interest.”

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I am not saying leadership is good and management is bad. They are simply different. They serve different purposes, and both need to be practiced and integrated. The fundamental purpose of management is to keep the current systems functioning. The fundamental purpose of leadership is to produce useful change, especially non-incremental change.

Often the challenge of change, presented at the Continuums, is non-incremental. Because the rate of change has been growing and accelerating, leadership needs to become a growing part of a dentist's managerial work.

If indeed we become what we think about, your future is forged by your ability to intentionally reflect on your personal and professional life. What you have today is the result of choices made yesterday... What you have tomorrow will be the result of decisions you make today... Isn't it interesting?

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