



CPSQA/Excellence Canada Public Sector Excellence Lifetime Achievement Award - 2013¹

Acceptance Speech by Dr. Jack Kitts

Embracing change, seizing opportunities, transforming organizations – I can't think of a better title for a leadership symposium. You have captured, in 3 short phrases the essence of leadership. And the public service is rich in strong leaders who transform organizations to provide quality service to Canadian taxpayers. For these reasons, I am deeply honoured and truly humbled to be standing here before you, being recognized by the Canadian Public Sector Quality Association – Excellence Canada for leadership. I want to thank the nominating committee for recognizing me, and I want all of you to know that this award is particularly cherished, because I am amongst so many incredible leaders in the public service here today.

As I was thinking about what to say to such a distinguished crowd - I actually froze. What does one say to a group of leaders, who in their own right have accomplished so much thus far in their careers? I settled on sharing with you what I believe are the most important factors that enabled me to lead The Ottawa Hospital to a better place. And because I believe that most people are like me, and can remember only three things at a time, I will limit my list to three:

First, create a high performing team,
Second, set a Big Hairy Audacious Goal (BHAG) and,
Third, inspire people.

I truly believe that these 3 key actions of leaders will enable them to successfully transform any organization.

Let's begin with the team. Every great leader will be the first to tell you they are only as good as their team. And I will be the first to say that my team means everything to me. I am a big fan of Jim Collins. When he talks about the right people in the right seats on the bus, and the wrong people off the bus, it resonates loud and clear with me. I will share a secret with you. I did an MBA because I didn't know how to read financial statements. Today, I just manage to get by. But I have one of the best CFO's in the country. And so it goes for HR, Operations, Nursing and Medical leadership, etc. Every one of my direct reports is far brighter and more knowledgeable in their respective portfolios than I could ever hope to be.

And for a CEO, there is not a better feeling in the world. Your team is everything to you. But I want to take a moment to mention the other team. You cannot sustain success without work-life balance.... You cannot succeed if you focus your entire being on the success of the organization alone. Great leaders need a supportive and nurturing home team. We all have our moments – and during those moments, your best team is your home team. Unconditional love is priceless AND cannot be taken for granted.

In his book "Good to Great", Jim Collins states that every great organization has a BHAG – big hairy audacious goal.

In late 2001, TOH was in chaos – the result of a forced hostile merger of several hospitals and clinical programs. The hospital had accumulated the largest debt ever seen in a Canadian hospital, morale was extremely low, and there were growing concerns about quality of patient care. In an unprecedented move, the government of the day fired the board of directors and the CEO, and appointed a provincial Supervisor to take over governance and management of TOH. In February 2002, the Supervisor announced a new Board of Directors, and a new CEO. Our task was clear – stabilize operations and finances; and improve morale and quality of patient care.

Improvement came early – TOH balanced its budget the following year and has achieved a balanced budget every year since.

In addition to a balanced budget, TOH has invested more than half a billion in assets over the past 10 years. Staff morale and quality of care have improved – but we knew we could do better. By 2009, we had become increasingly frustrated by our perceived slow progress in quality. We invited a review team, led by a Professor from Harvard, to review TOH quality performance and asked them to rank us against



our peer Academic Medical Centres in the U.S. We were a solid average. Now, despite being Canadian, average did not sit well with any one of us.

But more importantly, we learned what we needed to do, if we wanted to become a top ranked hospital. And in 2009, we agreed to set a goal – to be in the top 10% of hospitals in North America - for quality and safe patient care.

Clearly this is a BHAG. But today, we have very few doubting Thomas's and everyone knows their value in helping us achieve that goal. Think about what I just said. And ask yourself the question; why shouldn't the citizens of Ottawa expect, and receive world-class healthcare right here at home?

There are thousands of books and documents written about leadership. Everyone has an opinion on what makes a good leader. For me, I like to keep it simple. - Good leaders inspire people! –

How many of you have seen the movie *Invictus*? *Invictus* is the story of Nelson Mandela's early days as President of South Africa. It takes place in 1995.

Mandela has recently assumed the office of president – and the World Cup of Rugby is being played in South Africa that year. The citizens of South Africa are torn by the fighting and tension between the blacks and the whites – and Nelson Mandela wants to unite them. And what better way than sports! He decides that a victory by the home team – the Springboks is just the thing he needs to help unite his country. Now he didn't know anything about Rugby; nor did he know that the Springbok's would be a long-shot at best, to win the world cup.

What I find truly remarkable about Mandela is how he rose above the past to focus on the future. If ever a leader had good reason to be angry about the past, and vindictive in the future, it was Nelson Mandela.

He spent 27 years in a 10 by 10 foot jail cell – and he never committed a crime – in fact, he did nothing wrong. Yet he chose to put all of that behind him and look forward to building the country that he loved. There is a scene in the movie.....

Nelson Mandela, played by Morgan Freeman, wants to meet Francois, the Captain of the Springboks, played by Matt Damon. Francois receives a call that the President wants to meet him at the Presidential Office.

Francois and his wife become very anxious and concerned about why the President would want to meet him. His wife drives him to the meeting and he arrives extremely nervous.

Mandela greets him personally, has no entourage, and immediately makes him feel at ease. He is engaging, friendly and genuinely interested in Francois family and his state of health. He asks how his injured ankle is doing. He pours him tea. Over the course of the conversation, he asks Francois how he gets himself up for the big game? And then he asks him how he gets his teammates up for the big game. Francois talks about the usual things like, arrive early, focus, watch motivational game films and listen to loud upbeat music.

Mandela responds by saying that he understands all that, but he wants to know how Francois, as their leader makes sure his team is ready for the big game.

He asks how does he.... – after all he is their captain... – how does he inspire his teammates to believe that they can achieve more than they themselves, think is possible. After all, isn't that what leaders do?

The scene shifts to Francois returning to the car where his wife is waiting. He has a bewildered look on his face and is very quiet. His wife asks; "what was he like?" Francois replies – "different." She asks; "what did he want?" He replies – "I think he wants us to win the world cup!" The rest is history.

I believe we will all be better leaders if from time to time we ask ourselves the question – did I inspire anyone today – after all, that's what leaders do.

Before I finish, I feel it is important to acknowledge that leadership is tough. Not everyone shares your values or views, and there are a lot challenges and difficult people out there. And I don't mind telling you that I do get frustrated and de-moralized from time to time. And it's ok to feel down – but not for long!



I want to end with a short verse that I was taught by my Dad many years ago. And I firmly believe that all of us can benefit by listening to its very simple message:

Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference.

Thank you so much for giving me this opportunity and I will cherish this award for the rest of my life.
Thank you!

i Webmaster note: The text of this acceptance speech by Dr. Kitts has been reformatted to reduce file size