

1 **Developing a Culture of Leadership Excellence in the AAPA**
2

ABSTRACT

Developing a Culture of Leadership Excellence in the AAPA

The Leadership Advisory Commission (LAC) prepared this position paper to support a resolution to the House of Delegates. The resolution proposes a philosophy of leadership for the Academy, and explains the need for the resolution. The philosophy is based upon the following four principles:

- ***Leadership is defined by knowledge, skills, and abilities, rather than by position or title.***
- ***The core competencies of leadership can be learned, and the learning is a life-long process.***
- ***PA leaders value diversity and practice inclusion.***
- ***PA leaders identify and mentor future PA leaders.***

Section B of this paper provides a literature review for background reading, including qualities and characteristics of leaders, and the topics of vision, communication, and self-knowledge. Section C discusses the four principles in detail, including references to prior research conducted by the Academy and LAC. Each principle lays the foundation for the development of a culture of leadership excellence in the AAPA. Section D, the conclusion, considers the LAC's plans for future leadership training for the PA profession.

3
4 **A. Introduction**
5

6 The vision of the American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA)
7 is that *physician assistants will be worldwide leaders vital to providing*
8 *and improving the medical care of all people.*
9

10 The mission of the American Academy of Physician Assistants is to
11 *promote quality, cost-effective, and accessible health care and to*
12 *promote the professional and personal development of physician*
13 *assistants.*

14
15 In order for the AAPA to actualize its vision and mission, the
16 development of physician assistant (PA) leaders must become a focus
17 of the Academy's effort. While the Academy has researched its
18 leadership needs and has developed a variety of excellent leadership
19 training activities, the AAPA has not yet developed an explicit
20 philosophy of leadership.
21

22 The Leadership Advisory Commission (LAC) has prepared this
23 position paper to support a resolution to the House of Delegates,
24 proposing a philosophy of leadership for the AAPA. The philosophy
25 consists of shared values and beliefs that will provide the foundation
26 for a culture of leadership excellence in the AAPA, and is based on the
27 following four principles:

- 28 ***1. Leadership is defined by knowledge, skills, and abilities,***
29 ***rather than by position or title.***
- 30 ***2. The core competencies of leadership can be learned, and the***
31 ***learning is a life-long process.***
- 32 ***3. PA leaders value diversity and practice inclusion.***
- 33 ***4. PA leaders identify and mentor future PA leaders.***
34

35 Section B of this paper provides a literature review for background
36 reading, and Section C discusses the four principles of the philosophy.
37 Section D, the conclusion, discusses the potential for actualizing the
38 philosophy through comprehensive leadership training.
39

40 **B. Literature Review: Descriptions of Leaders and Leadership**
41

42 This section provides a brief overview of the leadership literature,
43 identifying aspects of leadership related to the development of the
44 proposed philosophy.
45

46 Philosophers, politicians, academicians, and business people have
47 written about leadership for centuries, frequently touching themes that

48 are as relevant today as in prior epochs. For example, Plato identified
49 four virtues associated with philosopher-kings: (1)

- 50 ▪ Wisdom
- 51 ▪ Courage
- 52 ▪ Moderation
- 53 ▪ Justice

54
55 Plato's list bears an interesting resemblance to Nanus and Dobbs'
56 recent formulation of the necessary leadership qualities for non-profit
57 organizations: (2)

- 58 ▪ Being competent
- 59 ▪ Being forward looking
- 60 ▪ Being inspiring
- 61 ▪ Being honest

62
63 Listening is an essential leadership skill. In the early 1500s, Niccolo
64 Machiavelli wrote his now-famous treatise on statesmanship and
65 power, *The Prince*. Included in his advice to a ruler of that era was:
66 He ought to be a great asker, and a patient hearer of the truth
67 about those things of which he has inquired; indeed, if he finds
68 that anyone has scruples in telling him the truth he should be
69 angry. (3)

70 Although he later became identified with manipulation and power
71 politics, Machiavelli wrote with insight about the realities of
72 leadership.

73
74 Compare Machiavelli to John Kotter, who described four mental
75 habits that enable leaders to become life-long learners. Among the
76 habits Kotter identified were:

- 77 ▪ Solicitation of opinions: Aggressive collection of
78 information and ideas from others
- 79 ▪ Careful listening: Propensity to listen to others (4)

80
81 Vision

82 The contemporary leadership literature emphasizes the importance of
83 the leader's vision, which is capable of providing focus and direction

84 for the team or group. In their classic study of leaders, Bennis and
85 Nanus described vision as "a target that beckons." (5) In a later work,
86 Bennis identified the first of four areas of leadership competence as
87 management of attention – the ability of leaders to enroll people in
88 their vision. (6) The SAAAPA Position Paper on Student Leadership
89 referred to vision as:

90 Purpose. Leaders have a clear view of the group's
91 purpose. They develop mutually agreed-upon and
92 challenging goals that clearly relate to this vision. (7)

93
94 The next step in the leadership process is applying knowledge to the
95 vision. Kouzes and Posner list five practices of exemplary leadership
96 (8)

- 97 ▪ Challenge the process
- 98 ▪ Inspire a shared vision
- 99 ▪ Enable others to act
- 100 ▪ Model the way
- 101 ▪ Encourage the heart

102
103 The issue of vision in a non-profit organization takes on particular
104 importance, since products and the bottom line do not provide the
105 primary motivation. Like other non-profits, the AAPA's vision is
106 directed at a set of values that transcend the profit motive. Nanus and
107 Dobbs addressed this aspect of non-profit organizational vision by
108 stating,

109 *The right direction* is the one that makes the greatest possible
110 contribution over the long term to society or to the particular
111 clients or community that the organization was created to
112 serve. The right direction is *toward the greater good*. (2)

113
114 Communication

115 The ability to communicate a vision ranks among the key tasks of a
116 leader. According to Bennis and Nanus, "All organizations depend on
117 the existence of shared meaning and interpretations of reality, which
118 facilitate coordinated action." (5) While not all leaders are charismatic,
119 leaders must be able to manage meaning in organizations. The

120 combination of a compelling vision and effective communication
121 skills inspires people to take action, a key issue for volunteer
122 organizations.

124 Trust

125 According to Kouzes and Posner, credibility is a foundational element
126 in the equation of effective leadership. Without honesty, credibility is
127 negated, and they state:

128 Honesty is absolutely essential to leadership. If people
129 are going to follow someone willingly, whether it be
130 into battle or into the boardroom, they first want to
131 assure themselves that the person is worthy of their
132 trust. They want to know that the would-be leader is
133 truthful and ethical. No matter where we have
134 conducted our studies – regardless of country,
135 geographical region, or type of organization – the
136 most important leadership attribute since we began
137 our research in 1981 has always been honesty. (9)

139 Constancy, reliability, and staying the course – all are ingredients of
140 creating trust. (5, 6) People may be drawn to a vision, convinced by
141 effective communication, but they must trust a leader to maintain their
142 commitment to an organization or project. Leaders create trust with
143 their honesty and demonstration of follow-through. This is
144 particularly relevant to volunteers, who must prioritize their limited
145 time.

147 Self-Knowledge

148 A final necessary component of leadership is self-knowledge, which
149 includes

- 150 ▪ recognition of one’s own strengths and weaknesses
- 151 ▪ ability to take risks
- 152 ▪ recognition that mistakes are an opportunity for learning
- 153 (5, 6)

154 In his classic, *The Effective Executive*, Peter Drucker stated,

155 Effective executives build on strengths – their own
156 strengths, the strengths of their superiors, colleagues,
157 and subordinates; and on the strengths in the situation,
158 that is, on what they can do. (10)

159 Kotter described the mental habit that makes these insights possible as
160 “humble self-reflection.” (4)

161
162 Covey and Goleman stated that “a leader possesses self-knowledge,
163 accepts responsibility and exhibits emotional maturity.” (11) They
164 further defined these characteristics as:

- 165 ▪ Knowing oneself
- 166 ▪ Being willing to engage in personal change
- 167 ▪ Motivating oneself
- 168 ▪ Taking responsibility for personal behaviors and actions
- 169 ▪ Managing one’s emotions
- 170 ▪ Recognizing others’ emotions
- 171 ▪ Handling relationships
- 172 ▪ Making corrections/adjustments as needed

173
174 The discussion above lays the foundation for the philosophy of
175 leadership proposed by the LAC in the next section.

176 **C. Proposed Philosophy of Leadership for the AAPA**

177
178 Tom Peters reminds us that for an organization to grow, to be a leader
179 in its field, and to think outside the box, the organization needs to
180 break the mold. (12) An innovative culture of leadership in the AAPA
181 would consider unconventional ideas and approaches to training, so
182 that its leaders and members can

- 183 ▪ embrace the organization and regard it as their own
- 184 ▪ value its vision and mission
- 185 ▪ lead the way into the next decade
- 186 ▪ exhibit leadership at the local, regional, national, and
187 international level

188

189 The LAC proposes the following four principles as the foundation of
 190 the philosophy of leadership of the AAPA:
 191
 192 **1. Leadership is defined by knowledge, skills and abilities, rather**
 193 **than by position or title.**
 194
 195 In order to broaden our shared understanding of PAs as leaders, we
 196 need a definition of leadership that is not limited to elected office. In
 197 their 1997 Leadership Audit report, Tecker Consultants recommended
 198 that the Academy should, “broaden the definition of leadership to
 199 encompass all leaders at all levels.” (13) In 1999, the Leadership
 200 Project Task Force Report asserted that, “leadership is not defined by
 201 or limited to the position or title one holds.” (14)
 202
 203 This new definition, based on activities and traits rather than position,
 204 recognizes the many arenas in which PA exercise leadership including:
 205 ▪ family
 206 ▪ work settings (e.g. clinical, military, education,
 207 administration, research)
 208 ▪ community organizations (e.g. religion-based, advocacy,
 209 social, sports, international)
 210 ▪ formal and informal organizations in the workplace and
 211 community
 212 ▪ political organizations (e.g. regional, state, national,
 213 international)
 214 ▪ professional organizations (e.g. administrative,
 215 counseling, physician groups)
 216 ▪ PA educator organizations (APAP consortia and national
 217 level)
 218 ▪ AAPA (national level, constituent organizations,
 219 SAAAPA, local PA organizations, coalitions of PAs, and
 220 other health care professionals)
 221
 222 The SAAAPA Position Paper on Student Leadership, published in
 223 1999, aligned with this approach to leadership, as stated below:

224 Leadership skills can be displayed in a variety of
 225 settings, not just while the student is fulfilling
 226 professional responsibilities. A student can be a
 227 leader in scholastics as well as a leader in multiple
 228 clinical settings. Fostering leadership skills in PA
 229 students only serves to create better PAs. (7)
 230
 231 If not defined by position, what are the activities and traits that define
 232 leadership? Using the broad categories discussed in Section B above,
 233 LAC proposes that a set of knowledge, skills, and abilities can be
 234 identified that define leadership in action. As trained clinicians, PAs
 235 learn the foundation of core competencies required for clinical practice
 236 in their PA educational programs and build upon that foundation in the
 237 workplace. Likewise, leadership requires a set of core competencies
 238 that can be taught, learned and reinforced over a lifetime.
 239
 240 From November 2001, until March 2002, the LAC conducted an on-
 241 line Leadership Needs Assessment survey. AAPA members were
 242 asked to rank their interest in and need for learning in selected
 243 leadership topics. The 900 respondents ranked the following two
 244 topics as both their highest interest area and their greatest need for
 245 development:
 246 ▪ Understanding the health care environment
 247 ▪ Developing credibility and integrity as a leader
 248 The results highlight the core qualities of leadership and leaders
 249 discussed in the beginning of this paper – knowledge/competence and
 250 honesty/integrity/trust. (15)
 251
 252 In an earlier study, the 1999 LAC Survey Report summarized the
 253 responses of 155 AAPA leaders (44% return rate of 350 mailed
 254 surveys), who were asked to review a set of learning objectives related
 255 to leadership and rank their perceived importance. The top eight
 256 objectives chosen are listed below, from the highest rank in
 257 descending order:
 258 1) Leadership theories, styles, and functions
 259 2) Team building

260 3) Working with others
 261 4) Strategic thinking
 262 5) Strategic analysis and planning
 263 6) Motivating and empowering
 264 7) Conflict management
 265 8) Conducting a meeting (16)
 266
 267 The results of both surveys can be used to build a blueprint of the core
 268 knowledge, skills, and abilities required for leadership. Core
 269 knowledge and abilities are explicitly identified in the 2002 survey.
 270 The skill sets identified in the 1999 survey imply other areas of
 271 knowledge and ability. For example, conflict management is a skill
 272 that requires knowledge: self-knowledge and knowledge of other
 273 people’s motivations and styles. Dealing successfully with conflict
 274 also requires abilities: flexibility, tolerance for conflict, and valuing
 275 differences of opinion.
 276
 277 By defining the core competencies of leadership and providing
 278 training to its members, the Academy can focus on leadership
 279 development at all levels. LAC will continue to define these core
 280 competencies and develop a corresponding agenda of leadership
 281 training.
 282
 283 **2. The core competencies of leadership can be learned, and the**
 284 **learning is a life-long process.**
 285
 286 As PAs, we have all had the experience of learning new competencies
 287 and developing our abilities through our education and in the
 288 workplace. Likewise, the core competencies of leadership can be
 289 learned, and like clinical skills, leadership takes time to develop.
 290 Staley provides an eloquent reminder about the necessity for patience
 291 with his statement, “Remember that leadership isn’t a moment of
 292 arrival, it is a lifelong process.” (17)
 293
 294 To actualize the vision and mission of the Academy, we must move
 295 beyond these common myths about leadership:

296
 297
 298
 299
 300
 301
 302 As the 1999 AAPA Leadership Project Task Force Report states,
 303 “leadership skills can be learned through a variety of methods and
 304 media,” and, “becoming a good leader is a lifetime process, not a
 305 certification.” (18)
 306
 307 The Academy supports leadership learning by sponsoring a variety of
 308 training activities, including web based modules, workshops,
 309 presentations, mentoring, and peer facilitation. LAC provides training
 310 during the Leadership Summit and AAPA Annual Conference. With
 311 the identification of the core competencies of leadership, these
 312 activities can be expanded and organized to meet the needs of
 313 members at different stages of leadership development.
 314
 315 While recognizing the importance of Academy efforts in leadership
 316 development, it is necessary to reiterate the findings of the AAPA
 317 Leadership Project Task Force, “individuals are ultimately responsible
 318 for their own personal, career and leadership development.” (18) By
 319 adopting the proposed philosophy of leadership and by creating a
 320 culture of leadership, the Academy can empower its members to
 321 develop their own leadership potential at all levels.
 322
 323 **3. PA leaders value diversity and practice inclusion**
 324
 325 On the threshold of globalization of the PA profession, valuing
 326 diversity and practicing inclusion must become a high priority for the
 327 Academy and all PAs. The AAPA Strategic Management Directions
 328 for 2002-2003 include diversity as a cross-cutting concern, relevant to
 329 all other strategies:
 330 Diversity – Promote an inclusive environment that maximizes
 331 individual and organizational opportunity, potential, and

332 responsibility. Encourage an environment that promotes and
333 educates PAs in the cultural competency of the patient care.
334
335 Diversity has many meanings in contemporary American life.
336 Fundamental to most definitions of diversity, however, is the word
337 “difference.” Among the learning objectives developed for the AAPA
338 Leadership Skills Development Project, the following are related to
339 appreciation of diversity:
340 ▪ Recognize the unique characteristics that define oneself and
341 others.
342 ▪ Understand and appreciate the need for and advantages of
343 working with individuals whose race, sex, religion, ethnic
344 origin, culture, languages, skills, styles, and personalities are
345 different from one’s own. (14)
346
347 The first objective requires self knowledge, as mentioned earlier, as
348 well as the ability to perceive similarities and differences with other
349 people. While we celebrate our common ground as PAs, and realize
350 that we have more in common than differences, we must recognize
351 that,
352 People are different in fundamental ways. We often perceive
353 these differences as “mistakes” that need correcting, rather
354 than differences to be appreciated. (19)
355
356 Using a broad definition of diversity enables us to appreciate common
357 ground and differences while recruiting volunteers, building teams,
358 negotiating consensus, and managing conflict. Bennis described the
359 value of diversity as follows,
360 Like portfolios, organizations benefit from diversity.
361 Effective leaders resist the urge to people their staffs
362 only with others who look or sound or think just like
363 themselves...They look for good people from many
364 molds, and then they encourage them to speak out,
365 even to disagree. (6)
366

367 Appreciating diversity is not an abstract principle. Diversity in action
368 means creating an environment which goes beyond tolerance to
369 genuine appreciation of the differences among us. Practicing inclusion
370 improves teams, organizations and communities. With regard to
371 nonprofit organizations, Nanus and Dobbs stated,
372 Leaders have a special responsibility for seeking to
373 develop multi-culturalism and diversity among staff.
374 Diversity has proven valuable in all types of
375 organizations in generating innovative ideas;
376 broadening the appeal of the organization; expanding
377 its network of donors and volunteers; and making it
378 more open, flexible, and responsible.” (2)
379
380 An additional dimension of diversity needed for AAPA leadership is
381 summarized in the frequently quoted phrase, “look beyond the front
382 row.” (13)
383
384 **4. PA leaders identify and mentor future PA leaders**
385
386 Leaders inspire, motivate, and influence individuals to take action to
387 achieve a common goal. Leadership develops from experience,
388 training, and mentoring. (18) The AAPA has the responsibility to
389 identify and develop future PA leaders, who can adopt the philosophy
390 and embody the culture of leadership excellence.
391
392 The responsibility for leadership development also rests with each
393 leader. Opportunities to lead bring personal fulfillment and the
394 satisfaction of making a difference. With these opportunities come
395 responsibilities. PA leaders in their communities and organizations
396 have a duty to identify potential successors, to pass along their
397 knowledge, and to mentor the next generation of leaders. PA leaders
398 who adopt the proposed culture of leadership excellence will help
399 develop the next generation of leaders to be more capable and
400 effective than themselves. Leaders should be willing to step up, step
401 away, or step down in order to make way for new leaders, and this

402 process should be planned thoughtfully. (20) The LAC advocates for
403 initiatives that motivate leaders to identify and mentor future leaders.
404

405 **D. Conclusion: Toward a Culture of Leadership Excellence**

406
407 Building upon the foundation of Section B and the philosophy in
408 Section C, the LAC proposes that the AAPA formally adopt a
409 philosophy of leadership, which will support the following Cross-
410 cutting Concern in the 2002-2003 AAPA Strategic Management
411 Directions:

412 Leadership – Promote the professional and personal
413 development of PAs as leaders in their workplaces, their local
414 and global communities, and the Academy.
415

416 Specifically, the proposed philosophy of leadership includes the
417 following four principles:

- 418 1. *Leadership is defined by knowledge, skills and abilities,*
419 *rather than by position or title.*
- 420 2. *The core competencies of leadership can be learned, and the*
421 *learning is a life-long process.*
- 422 3. *PA leaders value diversity and practice inclusion.*
- 423 4. *PA leaders identify and mentor future PA leaders.*
424

425 Organizational culture requires a shared vision and action to support
426 its vision. By adopting the proposed philosophy of leadership, current
427 activities can be enhanced and new activities developed that will form
428 a cohesive learning paradigm for every stage of leadership
429 development in a PA's career.

430
431 Following the adoption of the philosophy of leadership through the
432 proposed HOD resolution, the LAC plans to develop a comprehensive
433 plan for leadership training based on the following:

- 434
435 ➤ Training and development activities should align with the
436 principles of the proposed philosophy of leadership.

- 437 ➤ The knowledge, skills, and abilities, which form the core
438 competencies of leadership, should be identified and utilized
439 to plan leadership training.
- 440 ➤ Activities should be conducted at the national, regional, and
441 local level, using a train-the-trainer model whenever possible.
442

443 Adopting a philosophy of leadership will lead to the development of a
444 culture of leadership excellence, and will promote the actualization of
445 the AAPA vision that: *physician assistants will be worldwide leaders*
446 *vital to providing and improving the medical care of all people.*
447

448 449 **Acknowledgement**

450 The work of the AAPA Leadership Project Task Force was
451 fundamental to the formulation of this paper, and we appreciate their
452 efforts and vision.
453

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539 forward leadership thinking. In particular, the book hones in

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542

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546 strategists who point out that while having a 49% market share
547 in business means overwhelming success; in politics, it means
548 you lost. In their words, the purpose of the book is “to make
549 you faster, smarter, and more aggressive.” Carville and
550 Begala’s powerful and humorous insights from the world of
551 politics are exactly what aspiring leaders need to get ahead
552 and stay ahead.
553

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573 leader in all of us, and that true leadership does not always
574 take place in the boardroom, but often takes place at the level
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593 flavor of another culture. It provides you with intangible
594 information that travel books do not tell you (e.g., when to
595 arrive for an appointment, what certain greetings mean, etc.).
596 A must have for anyone traveling, or wanting to better
597 understand other cultures and values.
598

599 *Leaders.* Bennis W., Nanus, B. New York: Harper Perennial; 1985.
600 Leaders is a classic exploration of the qualities and
601 characteristics of leadership, based on the authors’ extensive
602 interviews with the CEOs of a variety of business and non-profit
603 organizations. Its examples don’t seem as dated as many business-
604 related books, since it focuses on core leadership skills and abilities,
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616 Leading with Soul is the parable of the journey of Steve, a
617 high-powered executive who finds himself searching for more.
618 The challenge of this book is to take one's leadership gifts and
619 lay them on the altar of one's spiritual roots and rebirth them
620 into wisdom, compassion and love. A must read if you are
621 searching, or even if you think you aren't.
622
623 *The Pursuit of WOW.* Peters, T. New York: Vintage Books A
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625 Peters argues effectively for the importance of breaking the
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637 knowledge and self-reflection.
638