Leadership: Developing mission, vision and strategy

BY JAMES ELMORE, MD

Mission, vision and strategy are necessary to develop a cutting-edge vascular surgery program. To maintain such a program, one needs to implement an overall long-term strategic plan, as well as meticulously oversee the administration of day-to-day details.

It was a pleasure to talk to Edward Woo, MD, director of the MedStar vascular program. He also is the chairman of vascular surgery, MedStar Washington Hospital Center and MedStar Georgetown University Hospital, and professor of surgery at Georgetown University. He supervises vascular surgery at 10 hospitals in the Washington, D.C., and Baltimore regions, including both university and community hospital systems.

Q. When do you get your best strategic visions?

A. Your mind must be on all the time. You always have to be ready to capitalize on thoughts. Strategic visions rarely occur in the middle of a ruptured abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA) but frequently do occur when I am driving or at home in the middle of the night.

Q. How do you remember these after-hours ideas the next day?

A. I email myself or my partners in the middle of the night about my thoughts. I have told my colleagues not to respond to my emails in the off hours, but this keeps my thoughts written down.

Q. What has been your greatest strategic success while at MedStar?

A. The recruitment of high-quality individuals. I feel that these individuals are my greatest reward. When you work with great people, you end up developing great programs, which in return fulfills strategic visions. The key to success is building great teams not only in the provider staff but with everyone in your vascular department.

Q. What has been your greatest learning experience while working on a strategic initiative?

A. You have to be prepared for the worst-case scenario to happen unexpectedly at any time. Any of the strategic initiatives that you develop could face unforeseen challenges at any time and you must be ready to respond to such fast-moving problems.
Q. The world seems to move faster and faster. How do you work with your colleagues in dealing with multiple strategic initiatives that demand your immediate attention?

A. Collaboration with administration is the key to success. No one will win without it. The vascular surgeons must understand the administrators’ view of these issues and then we can work together on the initiatives. For example, value-based purchasing, quality initiatives and patient experience are strategic initiatives that we all face; we must understand the reasoning behind the initiative and then work together on the projects.

Q. What strategy have you used with competing departments that provide vascular care to patients?

A. If you are a great vascular surgeon, you will always win over other specialties. Vascular surgeons have better solutions than all the other competing departments since we can offer both open and endovascular solutions to problems. It is my experience that primary care providers prefer to refer to vascular surgeons and we need to continue to be available to them and their patients. My solution for the readers is simple: Be the best vascular surgeon you can be, and patients will continue to come to your office for vascular care.

James Elmore is chair of the vascular surgery department at Geisinger Medical Center in Danville, Pennsylvania. He wrote this article on behalf of the Society for Vascular Surgery Leadership and Diversity Committee.

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