

## Tips for Achieving Success in Life and Work

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Thank you, Steve for being so generous. Especially thank all of you here today for this honor.

In *Alice in Wonderland*, the King advised the White Rabbit to “Begin at the beginning and go on till you come to the end: and stop.” That is very good advice for a

high-level presentation like this one. However, Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk who has grown more ill this past year, advised we see the end of our lives and come back to this moment, being mindful. Great advice for a life, and maybe even good advice for an invited talk.

So, I am moving the “thanks” from the end to the beginning of my presidential guest address, first by recognizing Lisa Frick, and all the spouses who make our lives whole. And of course, recognizing Steve Frick, our 35th POSNA president, a man of many talents and friends, who constantly engages us with his keen mind and embracing personality.

Hopefully, I will not leave you all in this state of sleeping, which my children tell me is common when a man with no sense of humor starts talking about “life lessons.”

As my father used to say to his two best friends at the end of a hard work week, while they shared a sunset drink overlooking the Finger Lakes, its “time to talk big.” I will do my best to take you on a journey that you may find helpful.

First, I advise you to practice this exercise at intervals in your life. Put a symbol of yourself in the center of a

blank page and assess who mentors you, whom you mentor, who your peers are—with other marks on the page representing how close and important they are to you. If there are gaps in your world, work intentionally to fill them with impactful, empathic people. This has been of great benefit at many different stages of my life.

A recent major objective of mine is to see if we can increase our emotional intelligence in surgery—something most of us could use more of (Figure 1). We established a year-long leadership seminar for the surgical fellows to prepare them better for the rest of their professional lives. They came to us expecting to increase their knowledge content and technical expertise, but we felt they would benefit from improving leadership skills.

To increase your emotional intelligence, you have to engage in self-reflection with a vulnerable eye and active listening. Recently, those of us in orthopedic surgery at Boston Children's volunteered to take an in-depth personal PRISM psychologic profile.

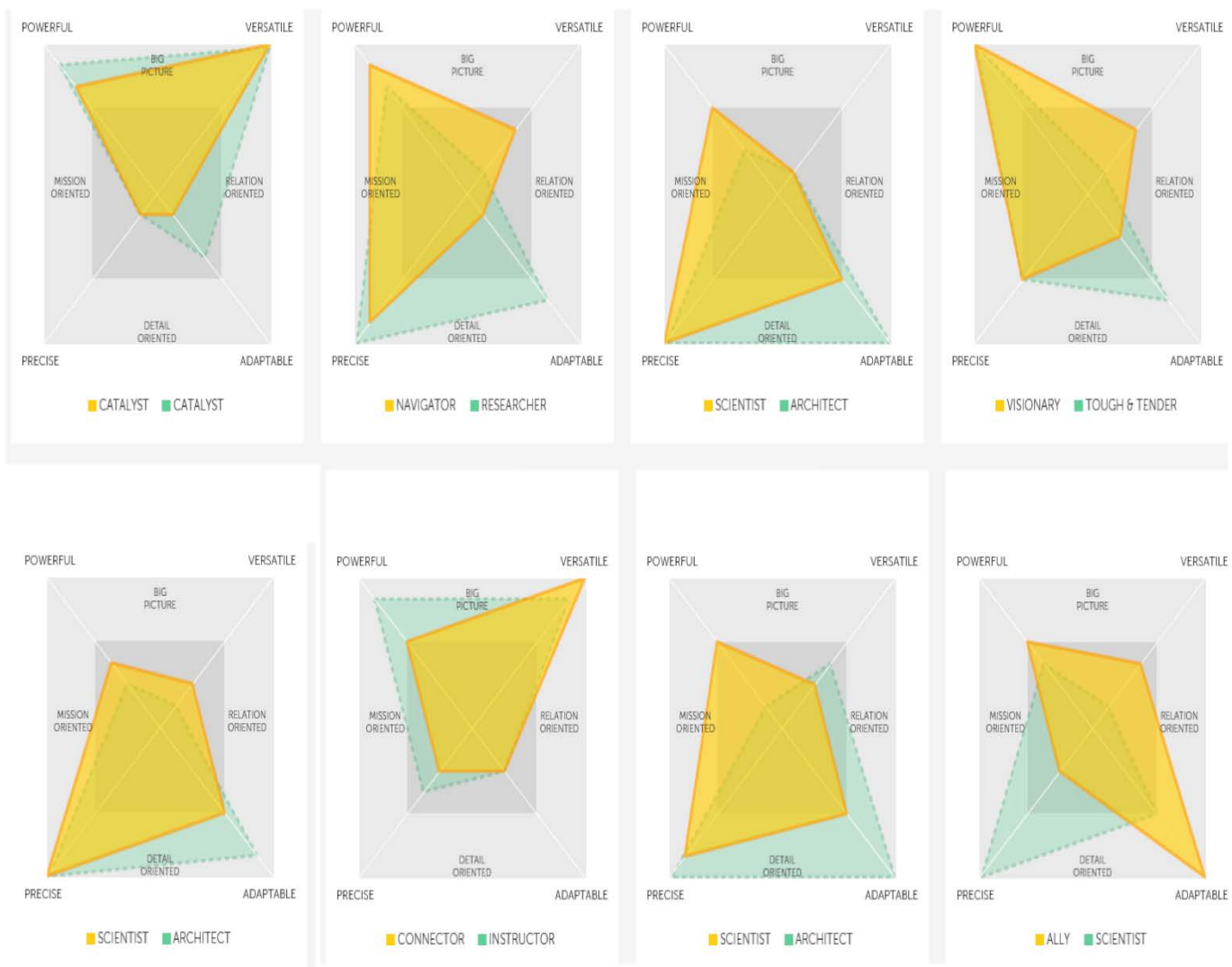


**Figure 1.** Although we teach and focus on educational content and technical skills for ourselves and our trainees, increased attention to improving emotional intelligence is critical to team success in delivery of safe care and important for professional development for all surgeons as leaders of those teams.

The purpose was to help all of us learn more about ourselves and each other; with the goal of working even more effectively in teams. We profile each member of our team (Figure 2). It takes patience, understanding and respect to work well together when we are so different. Fortunately, we have the same values.

An important takeaway from the Myers-Briggs psychological testing that is embedded in the PRISM is that you have to know what drains your energy and what energizes you—a very important life lesson that undoubtedly lessens burn out risk.

Everyone’s willingness to expose themselves to coaching and learning has led us to high levels of surgical simulations with videotape review. We use audiovisual simulation to assess surgical performance. Most recently, we engaged in an in-depth analysis of live surgeries we call REAL (real event analysis and learning) using validated scoring tools for situational awareness, teamwork, communication, leadership, task management, and decision making for surgical, anesthesia, and nursing teams individually and collectively.



**Figure 2.** PRISM evaluation of BCH sub-specialty surgical team indicating wide variation in personality profiles and mindsets despite similar professional values and interests.

Every sport I have ever learned, I have had a coach for. So, why not surgery? Why do this? Because we will learn and get better, have greater impact, and maybe even have fun because we are fortunate to work with so many dedicated professionals.

To me, education is transformational. So, whenever I can, I have pursued it formally and encouraged others to do the same. All members of our department have completed certificate or diploma programs in recent years. I reiterate—education will transform you and your teams.

Some of that education is formal, much is informal. In my personal life, my dear friends Joe, David, Michael and I have had a focused annual men's journey for 21 years straight. The first one was on fatherhood as we bicycled four days in our home region of the Finger Lakes in Upstate New York. As all of our dads died young, we had no role models, and we were hopeless and clueless as to how to raise our soon to be teenage daughters. Each year has brought a new theme and activity.

Because we are all susceptible to blind spots, we are unconscious about ourselves. We tend to limit what others know about us. We all will benefit from increasing what others know about us. We can indeed grow and learn more by asking and by telling. I encourage all of us to expand our public arena Johari window.

My best advice is to listen to those who know something about you that you do not. I have benefited from that many times. Dr. Henry Banks changed my life by directing me to orthopaedic surgery after I was already in a pediatric residency program. Recently, I had the opportunity to thank this 98-year-old gem of a man. His advice to all of us when he found out I would be speaking today is to “find the right people.”

So, enter each day with zest and inquisitiveness, even expecting the unexpected. It's not easy. At the end of the day, we all can feel beaten down when we give our all.

When the CEO of Johnson & Johnson held his company responsible for the tragic cyanide deaths from ingestion of their Tylenol capsules in the Midwest, their stock plummeted. When it was discovered J&J was not

responsible, their stock rose rapidly as investors trusted his integrity and leadership. When asked how he survived and kept going each day, he shared that when he was brushing his teeth each night, he felt like an abject failure. But each morning when he looked in the mirror to brush those same teeth, he said “Good morning Champ.” I suggest you do the same.

Two important women in my life, my mom and Sister Jane Mary, my fourth grade teacher, taught me that if I just learn to say “I'm sorry,” “I don't know,” “I was wrong,” and “I need help,” then I would be fine. The same goes for all of us.

I'm going to use basketball, a love of mine and Steve's, to highlight a few more important lessons. First, to emphasize John Wooden's clear messages on the difference between succeeding and winning. Wooden, the legendary UCLA coach, was clear in his message that we all should strive to be the best we can be, while focusing on our character, not our reputation.

Coach Billy Donovan sees the end of his coaching life in a Thich Nhat Hanh way, and works back to today. He does not want to be what my friend Joe advises against, a MOF, miserable old ...

Viktor Frankl, even while in a Nazi concentration camp, and throughout the rest of his life, advised we all pursue meaning. If you have not read his work, or have not seen his online video seminars, you should.

We are blessed to do meaningful work. If I was fortunate to make ONE thumb out of an index finger, that would have been enough. But we have an abundance of opportunities that make our lives so rich.

Our very own Bob Cady provided me with an opportunity to do something meaningful in the memory of my dad and his sister Elizabeth by establishing the William Waters Cancer Center for Children and Elizabeth Cady Children's Cancer Research Fund at Upstate Medical Center in our hometown of Syracuse. I am so indebted to Bob and Linda for their leadership. What a gift to my mom, Bob's parents, and the CNY community.

I must admit, despite being heavily involved in the business of medicine, I still stand strongly on the social justice side of our work, as evidenced by coaching kids

in soccer like Zainab, who was fortunate to make it from subsidized government housing in our town of Brookline all the way to a medical career, and Michael, from inner city Boston, who we coached in basketball throughout high school.

My son James frequently tells me his experiences in Roxbury taught him he was lucky to be born on the third base side of life heading to home plate. With great partners, we helped some of these kids get out of the dugout and onto the field.

Coach K is crystal in his message to us about teams and leaders.

Most of us learned to work alone: study hard, ace the test, and move on. But working together is better; and the present generation comes from case-based, team-based and flipped classroom learning.

Because role players matter as much or more than stars; and teams outperform individuals over and over.

Alas, conflicts do occur when working together, it's inevitable and comes in many forms. But pulling together matters.

Years back, I was perplexed by why, when people were presented with compelling data contrary to their belief, they dug in deeper. As a part of my informal education process, I sought counsel in books. Jonathan Haidt's *Righteous Mind* was extraordinarily helpful.

There is both danger and opportunity during conflict. Jim Kasser always made it clear to seek positive change. My teachers taught me to be emphatic and listen. My mom taught me to work actively to increase my conflict threshold. My wife Janet is a master at that while not compromising her integrity.

So, in the words of Bill Belichick, we should do our jobs calmly.

Whatever it takes, without resentment.

I agree with Angela Duckworth that grit and resiliency matter most.

In the end, build teams, coach them. We're lucky we have great teams of wonderful people.

We get to do important work. So "say yes."

Try to learn to be vulnerable and get better, every day.

Keep your vision on your goals and your values and remember the "whys" of our professional lives.

In corporate healthcare of today, the mission appears to be ROI and we are the enablers in increasing profits. I stand on the side that the mission is care of the children, and the finance and business processes are there to enable that mission we lead.

Finally, my dad who died when I was 10, left us with a reminder "it's later than you think." He never got to see his children have children, watch them grow, and joyfully play with them.

On my mother's side, we take family seriously, as evidenced at a recent family reunion in which 103 of the 109 living descendants of Michael and Mae Connor gathered joyfully. Generations come and generations go.

We have a spectacular spectrum of generational men and women in POSNA. Here's to all of you—especially Teri.

A few departing pearls I have learned: You can never speed up listening, as Thich Nhat Hanh advised, bring joy and ease pain, and remember we are blessed.

So, in the end, it is time to rest. Contrary to rumors, I do appreciate rest, and even sleep. But you have to watch out for what happens when you nod off.

Wake up with zest.

Find great mentors to help you and keep you grounded.

Aspire to inspire others.

It has been a tremendous honor to share some thoughts with you today. Thank you