



## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

# Leadership—Is It Really Lonely at the Top?

■ LOU ELLEN HORWITZ, MA

It's been said that "it's lonely at the top," and I think all of you have felt that at one time or another, perhaps even on a regular basis. When things aren't going as they should be at your clinic(s), generally you are the one who is suffering in silence, trying to figure things out—or at least ride out the storm without having to alarm the rest of the organization. When you walk through the hallways wishing your staff good morning, behind the smile your head is full of issues that must be considered and dealt with in the coming day, week, month, year.

It's true in the good times, as well. When critical decisions have to be made about the future, all the faces turn in your direction. You collaborate with others, but most of the time the buck eventually stops with you. Even in celebrating your successes, there is probably a little voice in your head pushing you on to the next challenge that you alone know about.

Family and friends are important supporters that try to help lighten your leadership burden, but they can't know all that you know or understand why that certain something has kept you awake for a week. Sometimes, it's easier not to bring it up at all, because it's just too complicated to explain and not likely to get you any new ideas anyway (or at least you tell yourself that).

Makes you wonder just a little bit why you do it, huh?

As you face down 2010, it's a good time to think about these things, whether you are in the midst of a success or a challenge.

I'm sure you've noticed the change in "tone" of commercials for all manner of products since the economy went south last year. In past years, we were exhorted to buy things because we were worth it or we deserved it or to keep

up with the neighbors, etc. Now the marketing messages are all about getting back to the basics, remembering what's most important to us, and giving appreciation instead of things. I think that applies to the discussion at hand, as well.

Why do we become leaders? I don't think it's just a power trip. It's way too hard to stay in that leadership role for such a shallow gain. Everyone will have a different reason, but it's probably a pretty deep one that's ingrained in who you are. You are likely a leader because you can't help but be one. Very few start at the top, but almost everyone who gets there is there for a pretty good reason—especially in urgent care.

The position of "urgent care owner" is not one featured at career fairs. There aren't graduate programs or internships or even job postings. Becoming an owner comes 100% from within. You wanted to make something, build something, create something that was your own. Thrilling, but terrifying at the same time.

From talking to most of the owners I know, those feelings never really go away, no matter how successful you become.

The amazing thing about our group of owners, however (and the primary reason for me singling you out this month), is the "viral" effect each and every one of them has had on the industry as a whole. In very few cases has an industry been built so quickly by so many working so disparately.

I encourage you to get back to the basics of why you started down this road, and realize that any challenges are merely the result of your success thus far. You are still in business to be able to have challenges! This is a good thing!

We may not all be bright-eyed optimists, but it seems that we, over time, are all becoming partners. You may feel alone, but you are not. When your desk lamp is on late into the night, know that there are probably hundreds if not thousands of little points of light just like yours across the country. And slowly, slowly, we are taking urgent care to great places, together.

Happy New Year.■



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