

What Does A Lab Leader Look Like?

This Issue: Vince D'Mello



Vince D'Mello is the Administrative Director of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine, one of four Centres of Excellence, at Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto. He has more than 25 years of experience with a variety of laboratory operations. Vince has a long standing interest in leading the development of best practices and utilizing meaningful operational benchmarks to achieve service excellence.

He is the Past President of the Trillium Chapter of CLMA. During his two-year term as President, the Trillium Chapter was recognized for its excellence by winning the "Chapter of the Year Award."

1. As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?

At the age of 5, I wanted to be a cowboy. By the age of 15, I had developed a keen interest in Biology and Chemistry. At age 16, my mother democratically volunteered my services to a Pathology Laboratory in a hospital, which influenced my career towards health care. If you asked me the question today, I would like to be directing an operation that produces tranquilizers as I believe everyone in the organization would be calm and happy all the time.

2. What is one thing that people would be surprised to learn about you?

I can't hang wallpaper. Other than that, I was born in Africa, went to secondary school in India, high school and university in Scotland, got my first job after graduating in England, then 5 years later moved to Canada, where I have resided happily for the past 30 years. I successfully adapted to life and circumstances in each of these countries.

3. Who inspires you? I have had the good fortune to be inspired by family and a number of professionals who helped me build my career. My parents were truly inspirational in that they were hard working and led by example when it came to promoting our core family values. They made many personal sacrifices and continuously provided encouragement to ensure that their four children would have a better life as well as have the opportunity to pursue their education to become independent professionals, which we did. This provided them with immense joy and satisfaction. My first salaried position after graduating from university was as a researcher in a metabolic bone diseases unit in an academic centre in London. The professor was an excellent role model and teacher and willingly shared his knowledge to help the team research and develop new tests to improve patient outcomes. It was my first exposure to patient centered care.

4. What lessons did you learn from your best boss?

The most valuable lessons learned were:

- There is a patient behind every lab test
- Go out of your way to help others
- Share knowledge
- Respect is earned, not bought

5. What lessons did you learn from your worst boss?

Thankfully I encountered this individual very early in my management career and survived what is best described as a dreadful experience. What I learned was that title and the inappropriate use of power is not what leadership is about. I quickly learned how important it is for a leader to be trustworthy, ethical and have high integrity.

6. Where have you improved most as a leader since your first day on the job? It is a combination of strategic thinking and making decisions based on relevant facts and information, especially when there are opposing views or models to be considered.

7. Why would you tell a graduating high school senior to consider a career in the clinical laboratory? If you enjoy being of service to patients, then the clinical lab offers a challenging and inspiring career. There are numerous opportunities available to enhance skills and learn different technologies. A lab background provides a strong foundation to pursue opportunities not only in health care but other industries in areas such as information technology, data analysis and quality systems. Due to the current demand for medical lab personnel, graduates have a choice of jobs in a variety of disciplines, laboratory settings and attractive locations both nationally and internationally.

8. What do you enjoy most about your job? I get the most enjoyment from communicating our teams' accomplishments to a variety of stakeholders particularly when we have made a positive evidence-based contribution in improving patient care, through the responsible use of technology or streamlining work processes. Also, observing staff learn, expand their skill sets and progressing their careers.

9. If you could force your staff to watch one movie, what would it be? This is a difficult question for me as I believe I hold the world's record for the most number of movies started to watch and never seen the end of, as I fall asleep, yes even in theatres. Having said that, I would recommend "Patch Adams" with Robin Williams.

10. What is the single most important skill a leader must have? I would say that a leader must have a sense of humour combined with an abundance of humility. Equally important is possessing a flexible and positive mindset which goes a long way in influencing others to embrace your vision.