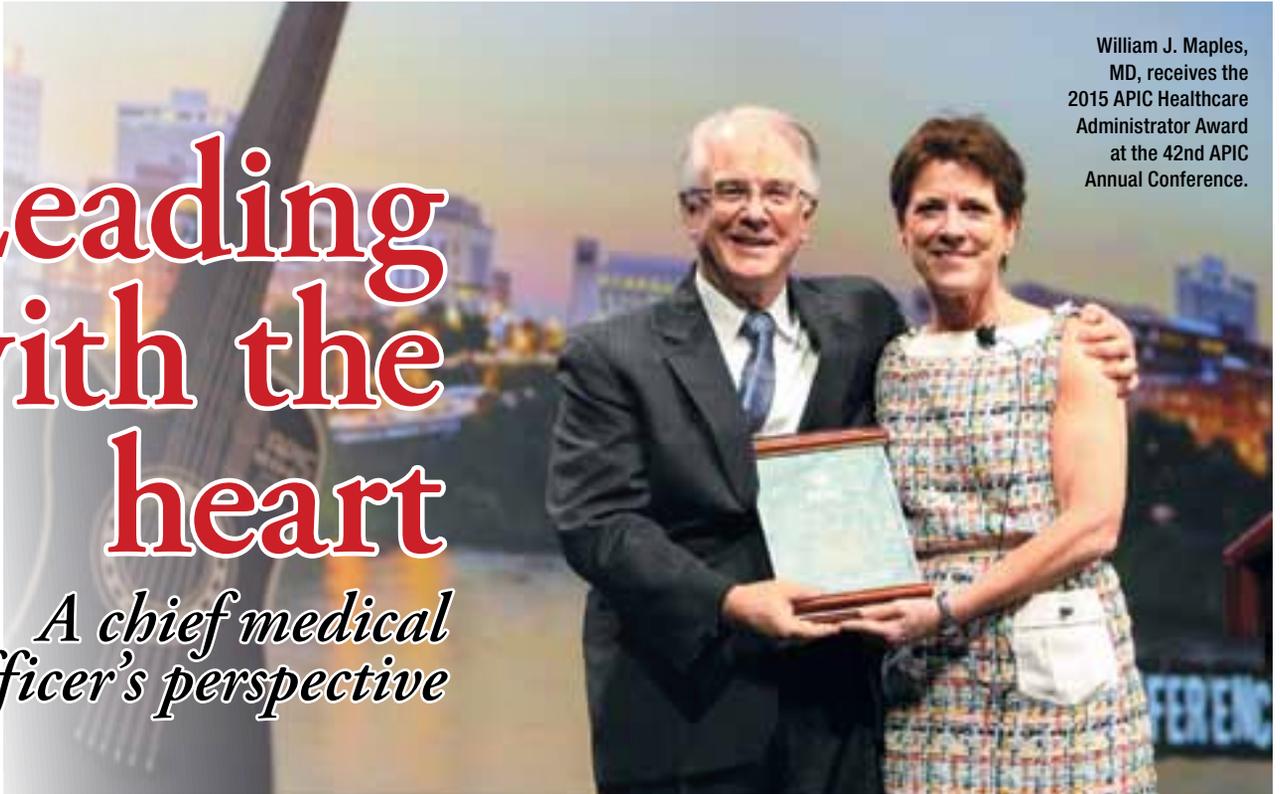




Leading with the heart

A chief medical officer's perspective



William J. Maples, MD, receives the 2015 APIC Healthcare Administrator Award at the 42nd APIC Annual Conference.

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A Q&A WITH WILLIAM J. MAPLES, MD

WILLIAM J. MAPLES, MD, has always been a passionate advocate for patient safety. Prior to his current role as chief medical officer for Professional Research Consultants and executive director of the Institute for Healthcare Excellence in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, he was the chief quality officer and senior vice president at Mission Health System in Asheville, North Carolina. It was for his work at Mission Health that he was awarded the 2015 Healthcare Administrator Award at APIC's 42nd Annual Conference in Nashville, Tennessee.

Throughout his tenure at Mission (2010-2015), Dr. Maples instilled a safety culture and championed infection prevention and control, engaging consistently with infection prevention teams, pushing for process improvements to protect patients, and ensuring that senior leadership appreciated the value of infection prevention.

Prevention Strategist recently chatted with Dr. Maples about his leadership philosophy and the skills he sees as essential for one to become an effective and authentic leader.

Q. What are some leadership lessons you can share from your work and management experiences in infection prevention?

Know your “true north” and be certain it is congruent with your institution’s mission, vision, and goals. Know what is negotiable and what is non-negotiable. Communicate again and again the “why” of an initiative/program and connect to the mission/vision/goals. Understand the cone-in-the-box phenomena to develop an understanding of how two individuals may look at the same situation very differently. Develop relationship-based communication skills to build trust. Finally, model behavior—promises made are promises kept.

[Editor's note: For those who may not be familiar, the cone-in-the-box analogy imagines that there is a cone inside a closed box. There are two peepholes: one on top, and one on the side. An individual who looks in the top sees a circle; the one who looks in the side hole sees a triangle. The analogy is used to

describe how two people looking at the same object may see completely different things.]

Q. How does one lead in times of high pressure or crisis?

You have to pause frequently to ask whether your leadership reflects your own internal compass—your true north—and the true north of the organization. Check frequently with the team to make sure there is a common understanding of the work at hand, and harvest differences of opinion. Transparently share the situation with stakeholders. Harvest the strengths of your team, trust their contributions, and validate their work. Take responsibility for wins and losses in the journey, and share transparently.

Q. Communication and transparency are two essential tools for leaders. How do you deal with these challenges?

Share all information unless there are detrimental consequences where harm would

“Harvest the strengths of your team, trust their contributions, and validate their work. Take responsibility for wins and losses in the journey, and share transparently.”

outweigh good (there are not too many of these situations, but each situation needs to be evaluated). Communicate in every possible form and as many times as possible. Understand that there often will be misperceptions of what is communicated (i.e., keeping your mind, eyes, and ears open to the cone-in-the-box phenomena).

Q. How do leaders create an environment where people can learn from their mistakes?

Embrace Just Culture principles. This requires setting guidelines, expectations, and rules and assessing if a situation occurred due to a misunderstanding, different interpretation, or system failure, in which case you coach and do not blame. At the same time, authentic accountability is necessary, and consequences for reckless behavior need to be incorporated into the culture.

Q. Do you have any other leadership advice?

Build trust; communicate; appreciate diversity; listen, listen, and listen more; know your true north (and remain true to that); embrace frequent, open, authentic, and transparent communication; and always understand the likelihood of misinterpretation of information and the cone-in-the-box phenomena. 

DR. MAPLES' TOP 10 LEADERSHIP PEARLS

- 1 Always keep your vision.**
Never lose sight of your vision. Never compromise your vision. Persevere your vision.
- 2 Connect “why are we doing this” with your daily work and vision.**
- 3 Believe in the skills and talents of your team.**
- 4 Build trust with open communication.**
(This one could be number one.)
- 5 Provide resources for your team.**
- 6 Hold each other accountable.**
Accountability takes perseverance.
- 7 Weave humility into everyday work.**
We all come to the table with something different.
- 8 Have fun with your team.**
No matter how hard it gets or what crisis comes, have fun.
- 9 Validate each other.**
Take time and validate who is working across from you and who is working next to you.
- 10 Pace yourself.**
Don't get too far ahead of your team, or you will start to look like the enemy.