

Letters by Craig Erickson, BSN, RN, CPN

Craig is a pediatric nurse at Rainbow Babies & Children's Hospital which is part of University Hospitals Case Medical Center in Cleveland, OH. He has written these letters as an encouragement to the staff at UH to encourage them in their practice. We hope that they will be an encouragement to you too!

Are you tempted not to care?

I was reading the story of a nurse recently who said something that made me stop and think. She said that some of the most nurse-like things she does each day as a nurse, don't require a nursing degree at all. Think about that for a moment. What could that include? Getting a patient or family member a cold drink. Bringing a patient a clean set of sheets. Sitting and listening as a family member grieves the loss of a dearly held hope or expectation. Changing a diaper. Giving encouragement to a patient who feels hopeless in the midst of recovery. The list is endless.

Our CEO recently made the observation that we are all caregivers no matter our role - this includes nurses and physicians, but this also includes therapists of every kind, patient care assistants, social workers, family life specialists, secretaries, operators, food service workers, environmental service workers, maintenance workers, IT workers, human resources representatives, administrators, and CEO's; and this is only a partial list. Our founders understood this when they rallied all sorts of people in the community to care for those in need in the city of Cleveland. Today, UH still stands primarily as a group of people (that's you and me) who are committed to caring deeply for others and providing compassionate care that leads to healing for those around us.

So what does that mean for you? *No matter who you are, no matter what your credentials, there is an amazing number of things you can do each day to deeply care for people.* In fact, most of the things we can do to have a profound, positive effect on the lives of our patients and each other require no degree at all; they only require a heart to compassionately care for others. And that's what we are all about.

Often the task-like demands of our jobs can ironically lead us away from truly connecting with our patients, their families, and each other. There are times I am tempted not to care because I have so much to do. As someone who works for a healthcare organization in the 21st century, I would wager that you feel that same tension at times. When you are tempted not to care, remember why we are here. Remember that each task we are given is connected to a person for whom we are caring. Remember that, with that task, you have the opportunity to care (even if indirectly) for someone else. You have the opportunity to positively impact the *healing* of someone who is hurting, to *teach* someone how to care for others or themselves, and to *discover* new ways to interact with the community around us so they find improved health and healing.

As an employee of UH, your job is more than a set of tasks and a checklist of to-do's. Your job is to care, no matter your role or credential. Fight the urge to simply complete a task, and instead seek ways to connect everything you do each day with the compassionate care of our patients, their families, and your coworkers. Then you will be living out the purpose for which we were created.

Blessings,
Craig

Why Are You Here?

Hey Friends,

Do you ever think about why you are here? I'm not talking about the deep existential why (though that's not a bad idea either). I'm talking about why you are at University Hospitals. Knowing why you are doing something can be even more important than what you are doing because the "why" informs the "what."

Imagine that you are dropped in a field and told to play. What kind of field is it? An athletic field? A field of flowers? If it's an athletic field, what sport are you playing? If it's football, is it American or European? If you are on the field with other players, do you all agree on the rules? The point is, it's hard to act in a meaningful way if you don't know why you are here in the first place.

So *why* are *you* here? We all come to work with different motivations. For some it's as basic as a paycheck. For others today's work is a stepping stone to another profession. But in the field of healthcare, we are made for so much more. Our work is not primarily about us, but about the people we serve. At UH, our organization is built on caring and compassion. It is built on engaging people in the community around us to bring healing, improve their health, and enhance their quality of life. To Heal. To Teach. To Discover. It's a mission that is not primarily about us, but about *caring for those around us*.

Do you ever think about your job this way? Honestly, there are days I do not. Maybe you can relate. I wake up some days, I'm overwhelmed with life (not just my job), and the last thing I want to do is come to work. Other days I want to show up, but once I get here my assignment is so busy that I get lost in the number of tasks and just end up trying to survive. By the end of the shift, I wonder if I have truly connected with, cared for, or helped anyone. There are also times when I question whether this job is what I was made to do. I wonder if there is something else. And some days...some days, I succumb to the temptation to believe my job is nothing but a paycheck.

On the flip side, have you ever had a day where the people you were working with were all on the same page – a day where people saw your needs, you saw theirs, and you worked hard to help each other to care for patients, their families, and each other? On those days, I walk away amazingly encouraged and excited to do it again. More importantly, on those days our patients and their families experience our mission and its roots working out in their lives. On those days, we are doing the incredible work for which we were created.

When we lose our way and forget our purpose, we need to remind each other why we're here in the first place. We need each other to help find our way back. We are better together. The work we do together is AMAZING! In our high tech, fiction-becomes-reality world, it's easy to lose sight of just how amazing the things we do each day are (no CGI required).

Take time today, and every day, to ask yourself *why* you are here. If, like me, there are times you find yourself here for the paycheck or as a stepping stone, you're missing out. Look deeper. It's about working together to compassionately care for those around us to bring health and healing. Take time to look at the people around you and see if they are connecting with why we are here as well. If they are not, help them connect by caring for and encouraging them.

To Heal. To Teach. To Discover. Let it be more than a tagline. Make it your mission.

Blessings,
Craig

Value Relationships Above Results

Hello Friends,

Do you ever make the same mistake over and over again? Lately I've realized I make the same mistake in nearly every area of my life. I make it with my kids, my wife, my friends, people I work with, even with the patients for whom I care. *I put the result I desire before my relationship with that person.* As a result, sometimes I end up trying to manipulate people, usually in negative ways, to get what I want. When my sons are fighting, it's much easier to have a snap response to correct their behavior, than to sit down and discover with them what's going on in their heart that led them to behave that way. When I have a disagreement with my wife, it's easier to become defensive

and fight back with criticism, than it is to listen to her, validate what she is feeling, and work together to find a solution. When I'm working with someone who seemingly doesn't care about a child or family, it is easier to dismiss their behavior as inappropriate and speak poorly of them than to sit down and ask them, "How are you doing?," with the intent of really listening and caring. When I'm caring for a child who is being difficult or manipulative because they don't like the type of juice they are offered, it's easier to dismiss them as spoiled or entitled rather than empathizing and helping them to understand their options and why drinking is important. Sometimes it's just easier, and more temporarily satisfying to do what it takes to quickly get the result I'm looking for; but is the result worth the sacrifice?

Take a moment and ask yourself, "What do I value more, relationships or results?" Be honest. What's your answer? Too often, though I want my answer to be relationships, my behavior says otherwise. While a self-centered approach may lead me to a desired result in the short term, in the long term neglecting relationships and choosing to care more about the result than people will destroy my results as well as my relationships.

What's the alternative? Choose to value and care for people first. As an organization created to care for the community around us, we exist to help people. There is a sense of altruism to the work we do. It is a business to be sure, but the business of healthcare exists as a way of putting structure around a greater cause. To Heal. To Teach. To Discover. These are words we use at UH to abbreviate the cause. These words have a rhetorical end. To heal who? To teach who? To discover for the benefit of who? Our end is the community for whom we care – our patients, their families, and each other.

Do you find yourself preoccupied with improved metrics, staff retention, increased patient and family satisfaction, or greater job satisfaction? Dig deeper. We were created for so much more.

Desire improved, lasting health outcomes; a community that is truly, deeply cared for that experiences healing; significant, trusting relationships between you and your

coworkers; fulfillment in the work you do each day. Let your relationships with those around you be your focus. We are people made to thrive in community. We need each other. Our work goes way beyond providing a service, and has the potential to create lasting human connections with each other and the patients and families for whom we care. With relationships as our focus, we all experience healing and the best health possible.

No matter your role, lead sacrificially with integrity and desire the best for those around you. Love people more than numbers and things. *Value relationships above results, and results will come.*

Blessings,
Craig

Leadership is for everyone

I used to think that leadership was for managers and executives. Sometimes we even use the term “leadership” as a title for people in supervisory roles as if they are synonymous. Maybe you have thought of leaders in this way. But leadership is not a given role or title. You do not become a leader because you are placed in a certain role any more than you become a car because you are placed in a garage. Leadership takes something more. How do you know if you are a leader? You have followers. Often these folks follow you because they know that you care for them and would sacrifice yourself on their behalf to achieve your collective purpose or mission.

Lately I have realized that we all have the potential to lead in some capacity. Often, I find myself following someone who is leading well. The best leaders provide the resources we need to work toward a goal and keep us safe (emotionally and physically) as we do our work. Without thinking about it, I found myself following a nurse I was working with last night and she probably didn’t even realize she was leading well.

Honestly, I need that type of interaction more often. We all need it more often. We need it because, without having resources, without feeling we are cared for, without knowing we are safe, fear and anxiety become our motivations and we lose sight of our purpose.

Some of us are natural leaders. Others need to be mentored into the role. Either way, at the end of your day, take time to reflect on all your interpersonal interactions. Were you exhibiting the same leadership qualities you hope for in others? If you did, celebrate the victories. If not, where did you fall short? If you fell short (and we all do at one time or another), did you miss the mark completely and fail? When this happens, choose to lead out of your failure. It's not the snake that bites you that kills you. It's chasing the sucker that drives the poison to your heart. In other words, it's not the mistake you make that causes the most harm; it's how you respond to that mistake. If you need to admit wrong, apologize, and change course – do it. You will build trust and be a stronger leader as a result.

Be courageous, and take every opportunity to lead well. And when you find yourself following someone who leads well, encourage them by letting them know.

What are you working for?

Hey Friends,

Do you like to-do lists? I love them. When I am overwhelmed, I create a to-do list and put all of life's demands on a piece of paper and start to cross things off one at a time. Writing a list is easy. Crossing items off is satisfying. Doing things gives a sense of accomplishment. But sometimes, after the list is complete, I'm left empty. Lately, I've been sensing that there is something more, something better. It's as if what I'm doing, the tasks I'm completing, aren't really the goal. There is a penultimate goal that I've been ignoring. Because I'm not working toward that penultimate goal, I sense I've been

wasting my time on things that don't truly matter, or at the very least I have been making less important things the priority.

In work and in life, there are things we do each day because we believe they are important. Often we are influenced by the cacophony of voices coming from the world around us telling us what we should believe is important. Sometimes life experience informs our decisions. Lately, I've been learning that the things I thought were important, while helpful, haven't been reaching toward that penultimate goal. I've forgotten what's truly important. As a result, I am left unfulfilled. Does this ever happen to you? Do you ever end your day wondering if you have accomplished anything?

So what's the solution? Know why you are doing something before you do it. In the field of healthcare, we have a cacophony of voices telling us what's important: accrediting bodies like CMS, Joint Commission, and Magnet; civil rights and lobbying organizations; insurance, drug, and medical supply companies; national, state, and local governments; and increasingly international groups like the WHO. The number of voices can be overwhelming, and in the midst of trying to please everyone, it is easy to lose our way and forget what we were created for in the first place. We can start to listen to all the outside voices and juggle their demands rather than living for the reason we were created. That's why having a compass that points you toward true north is so important for our journey.

Most people, including me, do what they are told. In work, we often do things we are told to do because we want or need to keep our job. But what if we stopped before completing each item on our to do list and asked the question, "Is this moving me/us closer to the goal?" In other words, is what I am doing helping me to fulfill why we are here? There are a lot of things we do each day that are good and right. But we are not infinite. We can't do it all (if you are like me you have tried and failed). So we need to choose. We don't just need to choose something that is good and right, but we need to make choices that bring us closer to the vision of why we are here.

Here at University Hospitals our mission is To Heal. To Teach. To discover. All these are in the context of caring for people – our patients and each other. Our vision is advancing the science of health and the art of compassion. We value:

- Excellence. We have a continuous thirst for excellence and are always seeking ways to improve the health of those who count on us.
- Diversity. We embrace diversity in people, thought, experiences and perspectives.
- Integrity. We have a shared commitment to do what is right.
- Compassion. We have genuine concern for those in our community and treat them with respect and empathy.
- Teamwork. We work collaboratively as an integrated team to improve patient care and performance.

Think about the task you want to accomplish. Remember why we are here and what we are about. Ask yourself if what you want to do is really important. Is it helping to advance the mission – not words or statistics, but people. Think about the lives you are going to touch. Think about why we were founded, the things we value. If it's not congruent, if it doesn't fit – find the courage to say no and do the better thing. Let our why be a filter for the decisions or choices we make. We only make choices that affirm what we believe to ensure that everything we do is a good fit for our cause.

We have an amazing opportunity to influence the rest of the hospital with the culture we have created. I envision a healthcare system where people at every level, from the patient to the CEO, deeply care for and value one another so that the health of everyone, from the patient to the CEO, is optimized. I am here because I care for the people I work with and the people I work with care about me.

Help people realize their own value to themselves. You are valuable. This is why you are valuable. Help them understand their own strengths and value. Put them in situations where they can fail and support them.

Move Toward the Dream

Don't just settle for a shadow of the dream.

Do you have a dream – a vision or hope of what life could look like? I have dream. My dream includes not only my life at work, but life with my friends, family, and neighbors. I imagine a world where the people I live with, work with, and play with love the folks around them, and seek the best for each other's lives. At work this not only includes seeking the best for my patients and their families, but also my coworkers and those in positions of authority. I imagine a workplace where we encourage one another in the good we are doing, care deeply about where we are falling short, and work together to provide the best care possible for everyone – physically, emotionally, and spiritually. It sounds simple on the surface, but if I think about it for a moment it has the potential to radically reorient how I approach everything.

However, I have found myself distracted lately - distracted by the need for recognition, distracted by the desire to be temporarily satisfied. I have been pursuing small successes hoping that I will be satisfied checking things off the to-do list. But honestly, I've been left empty. Most of the small successes, while temporarily satisfying, aren't really leading me toward the dream. It's like being on a diet and walking into a grocery store hungry and without a list. I end up buying all sorts of stuff that is temporarily satisfying, but that ultimately leads me away from the dream. Can you relate? Do you come to work hoping for small successes (or maybe just survival) and when you reach the end of the day you realize that you were distracted, merely surviving, but you weren't really moving toward the dream? Do you sense that there's something more, but responding to the circumstances around you in the same way day after day is leading to the same uninspiring results?

In healthcare, an industry that has created an infrastructure around accolades and recognition, we can easily become distracted. Our distraction masquerades as success, but the success is short lived. We move on to another year to pursue another award, designation, or accreditation hoping that the next achievement will inspire. But the truth is, what inspires long-term is the dream. What if there were no awards? What if we were not ranked for our excellent care, our collaboration, or our social

achievements? What if the world didn't find what we do to be important? What would be left? I hope that it's the dream, the vision of what UH could be.

University Hospitals was not created to win awards, designations, or accreditations. We were not created to be nationally recognized leaders in healthcare. As large as these achievements may seem, they are only small successes, distractions from the dream. We were created to care for and nurture the health of our community. We were created to help alleviate suffering. We were created to deeply touch the lives of those around us. Who is our community? That's our patients, their families, our neighbors; it's you; it's me. Don't get me wrong, recognition of our success is not a bad thing, it's a great thing; but it's not *the thing*.

We had the opportunity to see the dream come alive in a new way this summer with the opening of the UH Rainbow Center for Women and Children (<https://youtu.be/7gx5PP-IDuE>). If you look back at our history, you'll quickly realize that this is the type of initiative that we were built on. We saw a deep need that was affecting the health of those in our community, and we stepped in to meet that need. What I find most inspiring about this center is that the population it serves and the area it's in may not garner the attention it deserves. We opened a facility in Cleveland's Midtown neighborhood because that's what we were created for. Even if there was no major public acknowledgement that the center went up, it would be a massive success because what matters is *our* mission, *our* standard, and *our* story. And though we may receive recognition, the real reward will be continuing to see our dream become a reality and inspiring everyone in our organization to make that dream a reality as well.

The area you work in was inspired by the same story. Maybe you've forgotten the dream, or maybe no one has ever shared it with you. If you have not taken the time to look back at our roots, take a moment today. I promise you, it's well worth your time (<https://youtu.be/U053TBUtGq4>). With so many distractions, it's easy to quickly forget why we are here in the first place.

Learn our story and catch the vision. As an employee of UH, the dream belongs to you as well. Don't just settle for a shadow of the dream, but pursue it with all that you are. And don't pursue it alone, because our dream is too big to be sought by a select few. Remind those around you why we are here. We need one another, especially when success seems illusive, so that we can keep moving toward our vision. No matter your position, live the dream, be inspired, and inspire those around you. Let's dream together and move toward the vision that is University Hospitals.