

# PHILOSOPHY AND MANAGEMENT

Alphonso A. Quinones MA, RRT



In today's health care environment managers are expected to wear many different hats. We must master our professional discipline as well as basic finance, quality management, labor relations and be our department's local psychologist.

One of our most important roles is to successfully implement performance improvement processes that add value to care delivery. Sustained improvement is often not easily accomplished and requires considerable forethought, planning, support, reflection and retooling of strategies. Many of today's business gurus, like Jack Welch, have penned best selling books aimed at helping managers improve employee performance. Interestingly, many of the challenges that managers face today are centuries old. Maximizing performance and employee motivation has been a focal point of discussion for a number of histories greatest philosophers.

Examining the experiences and works of the philosophers Sun Tzu, Niccolo Machiavelli and John Stuard Mill may provide a historical framework of strategic operational management. Accordingly, Aristotle wrote, " He who studies how things originated and came into being, whether this is the state or anything else, will achieve the clearest view of them."

Sun Tzu

Sun Tzu was a philosopher who wrote the 7,000 word *The Art of War* in about 500 B.C. For centuries *The Art of War* has held a

preeminent position among Chinese and Japanese strategists.

Several lessons may be learned from the following story of the concubines. Sun Tzu's book, *The Art of War*, earned him an audience with the King of Wu who said, "I have read your work. May I submit your theory of managing soldiers to a small test?" Sun Tzu replied, "Sir, you may." The King of Wu asked, "Can the test be applied to women?" Sun Tzu replied that it could, so arrangements were made to bring 180 beautiful women from the palace. Sun Tzu divided them into two companies with one of the King's favorite concubines at the head of each. He then made all of them take spears in their hands and spoke to them: "I presume you know the difference between front and back, right hand, and left hand?" The women replied, "Yes." Sun Tzu continued, "When to the sound of drums I order 'eyes front,' look straight ahead. When I order 'left turn,' face toward your left hand. When I order 'right turn,' face toward your right hand. When I order 'about turn,' face around to the back." After the words of command had been explained, the women agreed they understood. He gave them spears so he could begin the drill. To the sounds of drums, Sun Tzu ordered 'right turn.' In response, the women burst out in laughter. With great patience, Sun Tzu said, "If the instructions and words of command are not clear and distinct, if orders are not thoroughly understood, the general is to blame." He then repeated the explanations several times. This time he ordered the drums to signal 'left turn,' and again the women burst into laughter. Then Sun Tzu said, "If the instructions and words of command are not clear and distinct, if orders are not thoroughly understood, the general is to blame. But if commands are clear and the soldiers disobey, then it is the fault of the officers." He immediately ordered the women who were at the head of the two companies to be beheaded.


Of course, the King was watching from a raised pavilion, and when he saw that his two favorite concubines were about to be executed, he was alarmed and swiftly sent down a message: "We are now quite satisfied as to the general's ability to manage troops. Without these concubines, my food and drink will not taste good. It is the King's wish that they not be beheaded." Sun Tzu replied, "Having received the sovereign's commission to take charge and direct these troops, there are certain orders I cannot accept." He immediately had the two concubines beheaded as an example and appointed the two next in line as the new leaders.

Now the drums were sounded again and the drill began. The women performed all the maneuvers exactly as commanded, turning to the right or left, marching ahead, turning around, kneeling, or rising. They drilled perfectly in precision and did not utter a single sound. Sun Tzu sent a messenger to the King of Wu saying, "Your Majesty, the soldiers are now correctly drilled and perfectly disciplined. They are ready for your inspection. Put them to any use you desire. As sovereign, you may choose to require them to go through fire and water and they will not disobey."

An application of this story might be found in a variety of settings including discipline, command structure and training. Clearly, a manager's ability to cut dead wood is a valuable attribute. Team

**Respiratory Care Week Is Coming**

**This button might do more for the Respiratory profession than anything else!**



**2" metal**  
**\$2.50**

**Outfit your entire staff with these friendly, professional and memorable (to patients and their families) buttons. Order directly from FOCUS by calling 800-661-5690**  
**\*(minimum order 5 buttons)**



## Leader in Endotracheal Tube Holders

**E.T. Tape** is a hypo-allergenic adhesive, latex-free, pre-formed endotracheal tube holder. A leader in the field!

- Easily applied by a single gloved practitioner or nurse.
- Exceptional tube stabilization and minimizes self extubations.
- Best holding product on the market with our exclusive cable tie

## B&B HOPE Nebulizer

The **HOPE** continuous nebulizer is improved **CNBT** technology, which relieves the practitioner of the laborious task of remixing **SVNs** every 15 minutes.

- Continuous medication speeds ER discharges and shortens length of stay.
- Simple Heliox administration provides up to 60% Helium.
- Connects directly to the flow meter.

**Available through most Hospital or Medical Distributors**



Phone: 1.800.242.8778 or 1.916.331.5221

<http://www.BandB-Medical.com>  
[customerservice@BandB-Medical.com](mailto:customerservice@BandB-Medical.com)

**CIRCLE READER ACTION CARD # 11**

members will recognize the leaders decisiveness and passion for achieving results.

### *Niccolo Machiavelli*

Machiavelli was philosopher who spent most of his life involved in the politics of Renaissance Italy. His best-known work is entitled, *The Prince*. This is a book of advice to a prince on how to run his state. Some managers find Machiavelli's work extremely harsh and others extremely realistic. The following are several quotes from *The Prince*. A new leader should make his rule appear well established and permanent. "Men should either be treated generously or destroyed, because they are liable to take revenge for small injuries-heavy injuries eliminate this inconvenience." Might this passage have application in your everyday disciplinary processes? A primary goal of management must always be to gain and retain loyal motivated staff. A question to consider in determining appropriate disciplinary measures may be whether the outcome of the process will be enhanced performance or if employee loyalty and motivation will wane.

Machiavelli often seemed to support a pessimistic view of human nature. "Any man who tries to be good all the time is bound to come to ruin among the great number who are not good. Hence a prince who wants to keep his authority must learn how not to be good, and use that knowledge, or refrain from using it, as necessity requires." He goes on to say, "the desires of men are insatiable, their nature urges them to desire all things, but fate permits them to enjoy but a few things. This results in a permanent state of discontent, and causes them to despise what they possess."

It seems that the take home message here is that you cannot judge a book by it's cover. People are infinitely complex and managers may not be able to expect their interests to be supported unless those interests are shared by their subordinates. Some have argued that this passage may have applications in organizational ladder and

pay-for-performance programs. The bottom line here is that people want and need to be rewarded if motivation is to be maintained. However, the rewards must be differentiated based not on good-will but performance.

### *John Stuart Mill*

Mill was a philosopher and economist born in London in 1806. His crowning work is *Utilitarianism*. The premise of *Utilitarianism* is that leaders ought to aim at maximizing the welfare of those governed. The focal point of this maximization of welfare is the promotion of happiness or pleasure. But what can leaders do to prevent employees from being unhappy? According to Mill "next to selfishness, the principle cause which makes life unsatisfactory is want of mental cultivation." Simply stated, most individuals want to learn and grow.

Regarding pleasure and the need to grow Mill wrote, "Few human creatures would consent to be changed into any of the lower animals, for a promise of the fullest allowance of a beast's pleasures; no intelligent human being would consent to be a fool, no instructed person would be an ignoramus, no person of feeling and conscience would be selfish and base."

"It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question. The other party to the comparison knows both sides."

The final Mill passage that I'll note may have a direct application for managers, specifically when hiring new graduates. Our goal is always to maintain high levels of motivation and an environment full of learning and growth opportunities. In the absence of this, enthusiasm may wane.

"It may be further objected, that many who begin with youthful enthusiasm for everything noble,

*continued on page 63*

medicine specialist Dr. R. Robert Auger and associates reviewed Mayo clinic records from the years 2002 - 2005 and found 20 patients who had been diagnosed with early-onset RBD. All subjects were under 50 years old and averaged around 34 years. They excluded from the study people with RBD who also had neurodegenerative diseases such as dementia or Parkinson's disease. The researchers compared the early-onset RBD group two other groups: 1) a control group of age-matched people who did not have RBD and 2) a group of people with RBD who were over 50 years old (i.e., late-onset RBD group). Auger and associates noted that a greater number of people in the early-onset RBD group used antidepressants than did people in the control group (80% of the early-onset RBD group used antidepressants while only 15% of the controls did). They expected men to be more affected by early-onset RBD since late-onset RBD primarily affects men. The researchers were surprised to find instead that a greater percentage of females had early-onset RBD than did the late-onset group (45% of the females in the early-onset group had RBD vs. only 13% of females in the late-onset RBD group). Finally, the researchers did not find that early-onset RBD was linked to any one class of antidepressants.

Auger proposes three explanations for the association between early-onset RBD and antidepressant use. One, antidepressant use may be inducing RBD. Two, the person may have in actuality had RBD but the manifestation of RBD symptoms may have been mistaken for a psychiatric disorder such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which resulted in the person's being prescribed with antidepressants. Three, it may be that a person was prescribed antidepressants for some other factor which itself results in the co-existence of RBD and a psychiatric disorder (e.g., depression). Auger additionally speculates that if antidepressant use is inducing RBD, this effect may be related to the medication dosage.

Other scientists have noted an association between antidepressant use and RBD. In 1992, Carlos H. Schenk et al. reported the case of a 31 year old man who developed RBD after beginning treatment with the SSRI fluoxetine. Marco Onofri et al. in 2003 reported that the tetracyclic antidepressant mirtazapine induced RBD in four patients who had Parkinson's disease; the RBD resolved after discontinuing the drug. Researchers John W. Winkleman and Lynette James noted in their 2004 study that subjects taking serotonergic antidepressants maintained a higher degree of muscle activity during rapid eye movement (REM) sleep than did people who were not taking such medications. Winkleman and James concluded that people taking serotonergic antidepressants (e.g., SSRI, SNRI, tricyclic antidepressants) may be at a greater risk to develop RBD.

Scientists are not yet willing to say that antidepressant use causes RBD - only that there appears to be an association. Currently, the association appears to be a relatively rare effect. Not many studies exist that have investigated this association but future studies may reveal whether this could be dosage-related, whether the drugs are unmasking underlying RBD, or whether some other factor is involved. Until more definitive tests are available, scientists caution that people should not stop taking antidepressant drugs.

*Regina Patrick, RPSGT is a veteran Polysomnographic Technologist, author and lecturer. She is a staff technologist at St. Vincent Mercy Sleep Center in Toledo, Ohio and a regularly appearing columnist in Focus Journal. She can be reached at rpsgtwritr@aol.com.*

Serving the Sleep & Neurology industry for 13 years.

**Faith Medical, Inc.**

[www.faithmedical.com](http://www.faithmedical.com)

DEPENDABLE  
SUPPORT  
YOU CAN  
TRUST

CALL  
800-600-1390

*Put your faith in our customer support team.*

**CIRCLE READER ACTION CARD # 56**

*Philosophy and Management continued from page 15*

as they advance in years sink into indolence and selfishness. Capacity for the nobler feelings is in most natures a very tender plant, easily killed, not only by hostile influences, but by mere want of sustenance; and in the majority of young persons it speedily dies away if the occupations to which their position in life has devoted them, and the society into which it has thrown them, are not favorable to keeping that higher capacity in exercise."

Mill would undoubtedly expect health care managers to create an enriching environment where employees felt both valued and appreciated. Additionally, intellectual challenges must be applied to maintain higher capacities or plainly stated, to keep the Therapist engaged in their job. The push toward employee empowerment and self-directed work groups may be a reasonable step in that direction.

In summary, the works of our great philosophers were not intended, and may not be directly applied, to our everyday health care managerial situations today. However, the writings of Sun Tzu, Machiavelli, Mill and others have been incorporated in the decisions of politicians, strategists and business leaders for hundreds of years. Their experiences and writings may be well worth pondering as they have served as a framework of fundamental operational management for centuries.