



Walking the Talk

Leading with the Values of Enough

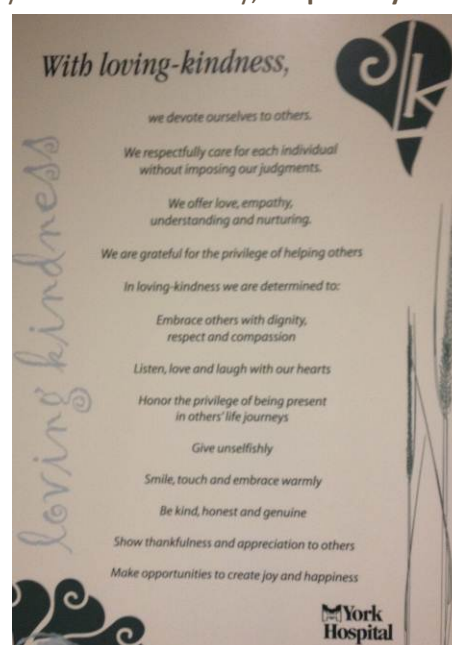
A conversation with the CEO of York Hospital, Jud Knox

By Shea Adelson

Walking into Jud Knox's office it is immediately apparent he is a leader doing something extraordinary. First of all, he works at a standing desk. Why? He says he moves a lot and is readily available. Secondly, **his primary and core leadership value is loving-kindness**. And he's completely transparent about it. Curious yet?

Though the door is closed for our chat, he responds to the knock that comes at one point, and says the door is open most of the time. "I spend 12 hours a day really with other people. It's about the conversations, exchange of ideas, the listening to complaints, and concerns; **it's about the joys**. My day is with other folks."

Jud is the CEO of York Hospital, the small and well renowned health organization at the center of a small village in southern Maine where I have recently moved. I am interested in speaking with Jud because of the nature of our work as a values-based consultancy, and because I am a customer of his doctors whose offices reveal posters and other expressions of the hospital's primary value: loving-kindness. To Jud, **this means practicing the values of compassion and trust in all the organization's relationships with patients, patient families, doctors and staff, and the greater community, as well as at all levels and in all departments**.



In the weeks between our two interviews, Jud has had to make a difficult decision to keep his non-profit afloat while he continues to practice trust. To him, **trust is never laying off employees, ever**. For over 30 years, he has kept his word. "Because laying people off completely breaks the trust between employer and employee," he says. For Jud, **this practice is the most fundamental expression of trust he as a leader can offer**.

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Jud realized something would have to change in the organization when he noticed a drop in income at the hospital as well as the tone of the media towards health care providers and institutions. He **immediately began communicating with staff**. "Without dialogue, no change is successful.

Since it was my moment of saying, 'OK I believe I understand the organization has to change,' I need to start communicating that to the staff directly."

To the chagrin of some, and upset of others, this round of financial stress has meant a temporary end to all 'time earned' for employees and pay cuts for doctors. At the beginning of the summer, this means **many employees will go on vacation as they had planned without getting paid**.

“I’m the no lay-off guy. I’m the guy who says, ‘I engage everybody who works here.’ And I don’t want to cut anybody’s pay permanently ... my definition of making the organization work is to make it financially healthy and no layoffs. So I have to act responsibly but fairly.”



Jud also set up three transformation teams: One on quality, one on patient experiences and one on cost. Everyone was invited to participate. He asked the these teams “to design and implement transformation plans for York Hospital because we have to be significantly different in 2013.” Participation is widespread through the ranks, and the plans are so robust, they have to be pared down. Implementation starts in the third quarter. And just last week, I read a [full page ad](#) in our hometown newspaper: **“York Hospital is Transforming for you!** A message from York Hospital President, Jud Knox” outlining the teams’ actions plans.

At Seven Stones we say **Love, Joy, Truth, Wisdom, Purpose, Commitment and Community** are the markers and making of a life and an organization within a

context of sufficiency. In our experience, truth is the foundation for trust, and telling the truth – and basing actions on that reality of trust – is not often easy.

Jud: “No, it’s not. Especially when you have something that is not good news. I’ve been kicked around a little bit: they’re not going to come up to me in the hallway and say, thanks a lot for eliminating my vacation. ... But I do the best I know how to exercise my responsibility.” And not everyone is upset. Plenty of staff appreciate the decision and the continuity it provides in the employee community.

With Loving-Kindness as the context for his leadership, **Jud practices the art of compassion.** He does this by refraining from checking the angry remarks made on the hospital’s Intranet comment board. “When I walk down the hall, I want to honor the relationship I have with that staff member [regardless of the negative feelings].”

Honoring relationships is at the core of any values-based organization. Using the values of trust and loving-kindness as organizing principles allows the hospital to stay true to its core mission and purpose of providing medical care. **This is the power of values:** “My relationship [to employees] needs to be whatever it has to be to help us provide love and medical care to the patients we take care of. That’s the important part of the relationship,” says Jud. “The fact that they may be angry today or this week because I did something that was painful to does not have to shape my relationship with them.”

With these current economic stressors, it would be easy to put values aside. We see this across sectors reflected in the monthly job losses’ report and the now predictable jerky behavior of Wall Street. **York Hospital has remained a relational enterprise when it might have otherwise bailed from its values during its current fiscal storm.** “It’s easy to talk about treating people well and having a good environment when everything is working,” says Jud. “It’s when it’s tough, and when there’s a lot of change, even sometimes when money’s ok but you’re doing a lot of change, that’s when it really tests the whole thing.”

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We see this at Seven Stones, in our own company, **how we could easily contract when the money is drying up. Scarcity easily breeds more scarcity.** Interrupting the scarcity spiral is key. Jud did this with consistent communication grounded in truth-telling, tapping the wisdom of the community by forming teams to innovate a new future, and making a difficult decisions while allowing joy to flow through his heart.