

Inspired Excellence



Purpose

Worthwhile Work

Making a Difference

Rich Bluni, RN

Copyright © 2023 Huron Consulting Group Inc

Published by:

Huron Consulting Services, LLC
550 W. Van Buren Street
Chicago, IL 60607
Phone: 312-583-8700
www.huronconsultinggroup.com

ISBN: 978-1-62218-115-5

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means or stored in a database or retrieval without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews. Making copies of any part of this book for any purpose other than your own personal use is a violation of United States copyright laws. Entering any of the contents into a computer for mailing lists or database purposes is strictly prohibited unless written authorization is obtained from Huron Consulting Services LLC.

Printed in the United States of America

DEDICATION

“The circle is a reminder that each moment is not just the present but is inclusive of our gratitude to the past and our responsibility to the future.”

Kazuaki Tanahashi

This book is heartfully dedicated to those who have built the foundations upon which we all stand. The thought leaders and pioneers who we look back upon with admiration, awe, and respect. Thank you for your legacy.

This book is dedicated to those who, at this very moment in time, are both the architects and builders of what we presently experience as “healthcare,” and who every day—through their minds, hands, and spirit—tirelessly give so very much to make this world a better place with grace, tenacity, and soul.

This book is dedicated to those who will someday be the thinkers, leaders, innovators, and creators who will take the wheel of healthcare and steer us into a future of promise, hope, and light that today we can only dream of.

May all of us—past, present, and future—remember that we are all part of this circle and that as it turns, we are doing work that is purposeful, worthwhile, and makes a difference.

Hold close to your heart a deep knowing that what we do is also inspiring, beautiful, and truly sacred.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	IX
How to Get the Most Out of This Book	XI
Introduction	1
Meet Jack, AKA My Dad.	2
Huron Flywheel*	4
No “Just-As”	6
Sacred Work	10
Principle 1: Commit to Excellence	13
Defining Excellence	14
Building the Structure for Success	15
Mission and Vision—Start With a Compelling Why	16
The Aligning Structure—The Pillars	19
Defining the Pillars	20
Hardwiring the Pillars	25
Goals that Matter	25
Sample Goals	28
The Synergy of the Pillars	29
Culture—The Foundation and Behaviors	31
Principle 1 Summary	36
Principle 2: Measure the Important Things	37
Key Concepts of Measurement	41
Connect to Individual Purpose	41
Clarity of Priorities	42
Cadence of Measurement	43
Leading and Lagging Indicators	44
Putting it All Together—The Scorecard	46
Engaging External Stakeholders	48
Converting Data into Information—Telling a Story	49
Goal Setting—The SMART Way	50
Goal Alignment	52

Connecting Back to Purpose	52
Principle 2 Summary	53
Principle 3: Build a Culture Around Service	55
<hr/>	
Building a Culture of Service—How to Read This Chapter	56
Introduction	57
Patient Experience—Words to Get Us Started	57
CAHPS® and Patient Experience	58
Section 1: Caring with Connections, Compassion, and Communication	60
40-Second Personal Connection	60
10/5 Rule	64
Compassion	66
Communication	68
Key Words at Key Times	69
AIDET® Communication Framework	70
Service Recovery	75
Section 2: Caring at the Bedside	80
Nurse Leader Rounding	82
Patient Communication Boards	96
Bedside Shift Report SM	100
Hourly Rounding*	107
Pre-Visit Planning and Calls	112
Care Transition Calls	114
Individualized Patient Care	117
Section 3: Caring for Internal Customers	119
Internal Customer—Survey and Rounding	119
Principle 3 Summary	122
Principle 4: Develop Leaders to Develop People	125
<hr/>	
Great People Need Great Leaders	126
Worth the Investment	128
Managing Performance—highmiddlelow*	129
Section 1: Developing Yourself	150
Own Your Individual Development	151
Prepare Yourself for the Changing External Environment	152
Mentoring	154
Section 2: Developing Leaders	156
Transitioning to Leadership—Buddy to Boss	157
Leadership Development	161
Leadership Development Institutes (LDI)	163
Section 3: Developing Staff	170
Cheerleading and Coaching—Two Leadership Roles	171

Coaching—Taking Behaviors to the Next Level	175
Coaching and Difficult Conversations	176
Coaching Conversation #1: Stub Your Toe—Coaching in the Moment	177
Coaching Conversation #2: Support–Coach–Support	180
Coaching Conversation #3: The Impact Message	185
Wait, but what about change?	189
Principle 4 Summary	194
Principle 5: Focus On Employee Engagement	197
.....	
Setting the Stage	198
Just the Facts...	198
Employee Satisfaction vs. Employee Engagement	202
Bringing People with You	203
Psychological Safety	204
Employee Engagement Survey and Employee Retention	207
Retaining Your Employees	210
Retention Key 1: Orienting and Onboarding New Employees	210
Retention Key 2: The First 90-Days	214
Retention Key 3: Leader Rounding with Employees	219
Retention Key 4: Stay Interview and Retention Conversations	238
Retention Key 5: Senior Leader Rounding	241
Principle 5 Summary	247
Principle 6: Be Accountable	249
.....	
Being Accountable—What Does it Mean?	251
Innovation	251
Renters vs. Owners	252
Standards of Behavior	253
Selection—Hiring People Who Align to Your Culture	261
Peer Interviewing	262
Behavioral-Based Interviewing Questions	265
Peer-to-Peer Accountability Conversations	266
Principle 6 Summary	270
Principle 7: Align Behaviors With Goals and Values	271
.....	
Aligning Behaviors	273
The Why and What of Alignment	273
Alignment and Accountability—The Dynamic Duo	274
Four Ways to Hardwire Alignment	275
1. Individual Goal Cascade—Sets and Aligns the Course	276
2. Results Scorecard/Dashboard—Tracks the Course	282
3. Ongoing Action Plan—Navigates the Course	284

INSPIRED EXCELLENCE

4. Accountability/Outcome Check-Ins—Checks the Course	288
Principle 7 Summary	289
Principle 8: Communicate At All Levels	291
.....	
The Impactful Sequence: Why–What–How	295
Manage Up: Position Yourself and Others in a Positive Light	296
We/They Phenomenon	298
Answering Tough Questions	301
Tools and Techniques for Effective Communication	305
Communication Boards	306
Communication Calendar	308
Staff Daily Huddles	310
Stoplight Reports (Again!)	312
Staff Meetings	313
Executive Leader Daily/Weekly/Monthly	
Communication Virtual Broadcasts and Recordings	314
Employee Forums	316
Worthwhile and Productive Meetings	322
The Power of Storytelling	324
Principle 8 Summary	325
Principle 9: Recognize and Reward Success	327
.....	
Why Recognition Matters	331
The Science of Recognition	332
Recognition Blockers	333
Criticism Versus Compliments	334
The Wonder Twins—Recognition and Appreciation	335
The Power of Thank You Notes	337
Individualizing Recognition	339
Principle 9 Summary	344
Closing	347
.....	
Acknowledgments	351
.....	
About The Author	353
.....	
Huron Learning Solutions	355
.....	

FOREWORD

“The greatest danger for most of us lies not in setting our aim too high and falling short, but in setting our aim too low and achieving our mark.”

Michelangelo

“Inspired Excellence.”

Congratulations. By opening this book and learning the Nine Principles® Framework set forth and how to apply them, you’ve started on an exciting journey toward leadership excellence. Leadership is the single most important difference maker enabling good organizations to become extraordinary to successfully achieve their mission and goals while making a greater impact in the world. *Inspired Excellence* captures the “how” to become excellent as a leader and, in living these principles, brings inspiration and leadership together in a powerful combination.

Leadership excellence is at the heart of every extraordinary organization, and leadership is a set of skills that can be learned and mastered. Great leaders are indeed made, not just born. And leadership goes well beyond a role, job, or title. The Nine Principles® Framework in *Inspired Excellence* is a true north to aspire to for every person in every organizational role and level. How to become an excellent healthcare worker, an excellent healthcare leader, and perhaps most importantly, an excellent human being. After reading this book, I renewed my commitment to becoming a better leader for the thousands of amazing people who make up our company. But it also inspired me to be excellent in other personal aspects of my life.

The principles set forth in this book have encouraged me to continually revitalize my connection to purpose and integrate my deeply held values into my leadership of Huron. Together, applying evidence-based

principles with a full heart and awakened spirit that is connected to purpose is an unstoppable combination of bringing my whole self to our company's journey.

The tried-and-true methods to drive Excellence, founded on years of research, have been instrumental for my own leadership at Huron and have supported the transformation of our company over the past decade. We've seen amazing results from the old and new methods shared on these pages.

But more than telling the story or sharing the journey of one person and what they did to move a single organization, this book takes a wider perspective and does a deeper dive. This isn't a textbook or an autobiography but rather a guidebook, a map, or a beacon to help you to tell your story and take your journey. It is about YOU.

And you could not be in better hands for this journey than with Rich Bluni. He is someone who has been where you are—experiencing both the agonies and triumphs of healthcare and leadership. Rich is also an accomplished coach and a gifted storyteller who brings the lessons and tactics throughout this book to life with practical examples that will get you thinking.

However, if I may be so bold, this book isn't just here to engage your mind (most bookshelves, real and virtual, are full of those). As I closed this book on my first reading, I felt it expanded my spirit. My spirit for leadership, mentoring, encouraging, motivating, accomplishing, and, yes, inspiring.

A smart leader is expected in all good organizations, and an excellent leader is certainly found in all great organizations. However, if you want your organization to be extraordinary, seek to be an inspired leader. They are increasingly rare and exactly what we need more of these days. It is certainly what I want my leaders to strive for at Huron. It is what I sincerely and humbly strive for in my own personal leadership journey. And I believe it is what we all truly hope to be.

On behalf of our entire team at Huron, thank you for what you do and how you serve. The mere fact that you're reading this book says a lot about you. I hope you are a different leader by the time you get to the last page than you were when you opened to the first page.

I know I was.

Sincerely,

Mark Hussey
Chief Executive Officer and President
Huron Consulting Group Inc.

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS BOOK

Welcome to *Inspired Excellence!*

This book is about leadership. It is for anyone who practices leadership regardless of their position in an organization, and we're thrilled to share it with you.

The Nine Principles® Framework— What Is It?

You will find the content of this book is organized around the Nine Principles® Framework, which is the foundation of our leadership work here at Huron. We firmly believe—and organizations have shown—that this framework is the key to creating, inspiring, and sustaining excellence.

The Nine Principles® Framework is both **TIMELY** and **TIMELESS**. It is timely because we need it now more than ever, and it is timeless because these principles stand the test of time and continue to be even more significant today to drive positive change. Since their creation in 1999, they have provided an important foundation and inspiration for countless organizations and leaders in creating and sustaining a culture of excellence.

Each principle of the Nine Principles® Framework (Figure 1) is unique and contains powerful tools and tactics that guide and support leadership behaviors that produce positive results. As we review each principle, you will discover how they can be applied to your own leadership journey.

NINE PRINCIPLES® FRAMEWORK	
Principle 1: Commit to Excellence	Set high expectations to achieve results while still living out your mission and values.
Principle 2: Measure the Important Things	Continuously track progress to achieve results with an improvement mindset.
Principle 3: Build a Culture Around Service	Serve others with great care and concern.
Principle 4: Develop Leaders to Develop People	Coach people to be their best at work.
Principle 5: Focus on Employee Engagement	Attend to aspirations and desires in the workplace.
Principle 6: Be Accountable	Commit to individual accountability to achieve organizational goals.
Principle 7: Align Behaviors with Goals and Values	Apply consistent practices to move the organization in a positive direction.
Principle 8: Communicate at All Levels	Help people understand how and why what they do matters.
Principle 9: Recognize and Reward Success	Value and appreciate people working together to get results.

Figure 1: Nine Principles® Framework

These principles also set behaviors and expectations to create and sustain a culture of excellence—the kind of place where individuals choose to work and achieve great things. By enabling an environment where high performers thrive, the principles provide a way for

organizations, leaders, and teams to attract and retain the best people, who in turn help everyone find their way to inspired excellence.

Tips to Maximize Your Learning

We know that improvement is essential to organizational excellence, and we're excited to help you get there.

Within each chapter and principle, you will discover valuable tools, tactics, and illustrations to help you develop your leadership skills and elevate every aspect of your work. As you dive into each chapter and principle, please take a moment to reflect on how they relate to you and your unique circumstances. Regardless of your role, discipline, or type of organization, your unwavering commitment to applying these principles will drive results.

Our aim is to make each chapter easy to read and reference, designed for leaders at all levels. We've packed them with relatable stories to guide you along the way. These practical approaches and real-life examples demonstrate how to implement leadership principles in a way that will deeply impact how and whom you lead. Share our stories and add your and your team's personal ones to make the teachings come alive.

While we draw numerous examples from the healthcare profession, we recognize that some of you reading this may work in other fields. Fear not—the Nine Principles® Framework described in this book is timely, timeless, and transcendent—it can apply to you and your organization, no matter who you are. A good practice while reading is to “relate and not compare.”

And don't worry about the order of each principle. Great leadership involves both linear and non-linear thinking, so these principles don't follow a proscriptive order, nor is any one more or less important than any other. But don't forget. When all nine principles are present, excellence is not far away.

Think about it like rungs on a ladder—all of them together help you climb higher.

Let the Journey Begin!

So let's get started. While we encourage you to read every page, we also want this content to serve as a valuable reference as you navigate your daily leadership responsibilities. Perhaps one chapter, in particular, calls out to you. Answer that call and read that chapter! Make this voyage

your own. Keep this book close by and use it to enhance your work and efforts at achieving excellence.

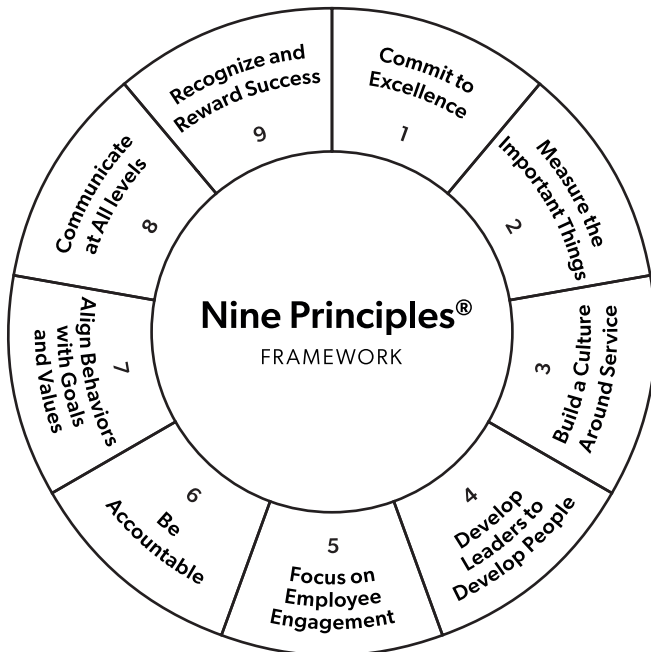
Look at this book as a roadmap. In that spirit, feel free to journey as you like and make whatever stops along the way make the most sense for where you are and what you hope to accomplish. We are confident this guide will inspire and empower you to take your leadership skills, team, and organization to the next level.

Thank you for investing your time in reading this book. Our utmost desire is that it has equipped you with invaluable insights and knowledge to propel you toward becoming an exceptional leader.

Best wishes to you in all your future endeavors. We have faith that the lessons gleaned from these pages will serve you well. May you continue to strive for excellence—inspired excellence. Thank you!

INTRODUCTION

Journey to Leadership



“The secret of change is to focus all of your energy not on fighting the old, but on building the new.”

Socrates

Hello. My name is Rich Bluni. I am an R.N., and I've been in healthcare for more than 30 years. I wasn't one of those people who always knew they wanted to be in healthcare. I know of them, these unicorns of mythology. You know of them as well. Some of you may even be one of them.

You probably remember how it went. In second grade, or thereabouts, the teacher would go around the class and ask the age-old question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Among all the kids wanting to be astronauts, ballerinas, quarterbacks, race-car drivers, and movie stars, there were the sincere ones who wanted to be nurses, physicians, physical therapists, and all of the types of people my favorite 20th-century human, Mr. Rogers, called "the helpers."

My wife was one of those. When asked, she told Sister Eugenia, her kindergarten teacher, "I'm going to be a nurse someday!" She has been a nurse now for more than twenty years.

She knew at five!

Not me. Nope. I was asked the same question sometime around 1972, and my answer was, "Batman." Pinky-swear, that's what I said. My answer must not have amused my teacher because she promptly relocated my chair to the corner. This location became a familiar spot for me throughout my academic career, and I even nicknamed it "The Batcave." I chose this name because it sounded much cooler than simply calling it "The Corner."

Why didn't she like my answer? I'll never know. I mean, who wouldn't want to be Batman? For most of my life, being Batman was as likely a career choice as healthcare.

But truly, healthcare wasn't on my radar. At least not that I was aware of. But like many of us who have come to find our place in healthcare, I had an "influence;" a driver or exemplar working behind the scenes opening that door.

Meet Jack, AKA My Dad.

When I was younger, my dad was the most influential person in my life. His name was Jack. He was known then as a "maintenance foreman" at Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami. These days those jobs are called facilities management or something similar, but he started working there in 1968.

He was a leader and had several workers who reported to him. If you ever asked my dad back in the day, “What do you do?” he always responded, “I work in healthcare.” (More on that later.)

My impression of my dad was that he loved his job. He was supposed to be there at 8 a.m. but was usually there around 6 a.m.

As I got older, I thought my dad was a bit ridiculous. Who goes to their job early and for free? But then, when I went to the hospital with my dad a few times as a kid, I started to see why. He wasn’t arriving early to be first in line for the fried eggs and biscuits in the hospital cafeteria. He was going for the people.

He met with his off-going night-shift team to see how they were doing and ensure they were well-supplied and felt safe, listened to, and heard. We call it “rounding” these days. My dad would have simply called it “Caring about my people.”

He had breakfast with the oncoming day shift, including environmental services, nurses, pharmacists, administrators, and security. He found the issues that needed fixing before they even made it into the “request system.” He had them fixed, often before the sun rose. He also knew the people, and they knew him.

I remember being with my dad and marveling at that. They all looked different, spoke different languages, and wore different uniforms and scrubs. Some worked in offices, some worked with patients, and some did both. Some fixed things or cooked or cleaned. My dad had a connection to all of them. He wanted to know more than what tasks to complete. He also asked about their kids, their health, and their lives.

He was interested in them as people.

Isn’t that ultimately what separates the “good” leaders from the “great” ones? If you knew my dad, you would know this wasn’t an ego trip. His actions weren’t about making him look good, impressing people, moving up the food chain, or achieving some impressive title. That wasn’t his driving force. It just wasn’t. So, where did this come from?

And then it hit me, like the Batmobile at full speed. It wasn’t so much that my dad loved his “job.” I mean, he was great at it—he mastered it, he could fix anything. But it wasn’t his “job” that he loved...

He once said to me, “I love my work. My job, sometimes, well, that’s a different story...”

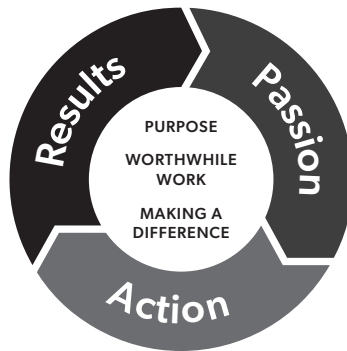
Think about a great human, a Nelson Mandela or a Mother Theresa. We never say, “They were about their ‘Life’s JOB.’” We use the phrase “Life’s WORK” instead. Now that comes from a much deeper reservoir.

Your job is the education, skills, experiences, and tasks you need to be able to do daily. Don’t get me wrong, that’s super important. But your work, that comes from a deeper place. If “job” lives symbolically in the brain, “work” lives in the heart... or, if you will, the soul.

My dad truly saw what he did as his “life’s work.” He lived and breathed something that I didn’t even come to learn about until much later.

Huron Flywheel®

Many of you may be familiar with Huron’s Flywheel. This Flywheel demonstrates how organizations can create momentum by engaging the PASSION of their employees to apply ACTIONS AND BEHAVIORS, guided by the Nine Principles® Framework to achieve RESULTS.



Historically, a flywheel is a heavy wheel that regulates the speed of machinery. It takes a while to get started, but it turns smoothly and efficiently once it starts. Momentum takes over, and the wheel turns almost effortlessly. You hear the engine, you hear the push that starts it purring, and as the engine moves, momentum gains until the momentum is so great it is difficult to stop. In fact, did you know a train going 55 mph can take over a mile to stop? It’s like that!

The Flywheel symbolizes and illustrates the power that purpose, passion, actions, and results generate to create momentum in an organization. Once the Flywheel gets to spinning, it is hard to stop!

Purpose, Worthwhile Work, and Making a Difference

At the center of the Flywheel, the hub, we see Purpose, Worthwhile Work, and Making a Difference. It always struck me that when looking at the Flywheel and reflecting about my dad, it doesn’t say “Worthwhile JOB.”

Say that out loud. Now, replace “job” with “work.” See what I mean? No comparison.

Passion

The first part of the Flywheel is passion. Passion fuels self-motivation through a personal commitment to beliefs, values, and community to drive our actions and set the Flywheel in motion. Passion motivates us to do what we do. It's what gets us up in the morning. For example, healthcare professionals' values and passion for healing and service drive them. Education professionals have a passion for learning that drives them. Pilots are passionate about customer safety. Passion is a high bar for all employees in all industries. The passion people bring to their work sets the Flywheel in motion by connecting the dots to the hub of purpose, worthwhile work, and making a difference so that people see and know how they can make a difference.

Fuel the passion that brings people to work by rewarding and recognizing the behaviors that help your organization achieve the desired results, celebrate successes, and focus on what's working well. Self-motivation born of passion is what sets the Flywheel spinning and in motion.

Action

The next part of the Flywheel is Action. This part represents the actions, behaviors, skills, and principles that guide employees' passion toward desired outcomes and results. At Huron, we use the Nine Principles® Framework captured in this book. This framework helps leaders identify and put into practice the behaviors that will make the greatest impact and bring focus to what's most important. Connect these behaviors back to the core value of making a difference, and your employees will feel motivated to hardwire them and will understand the difference they truly make.

For example, when a nurse identifies an early stroke during Hourly Rounding* and saves a patient's life, they understand the why of Hourly Rounding* and will repeat it. When a leader rounds on an employee, makes a personal connection, and learns someone is struggling and how they can help, they understand the why of a leader rounding with employees and will repeat it. Their passion reignites, their behaviors are reinforced, and they will continue their meaningful work toward achieving their goals and fueling the Flywheel.

Results

The third part of the Flywheel is Results. Results accelerate momentum for sustained success by achieving goals, key performance indicators (KPIs), and outcomes. Without tangible results, the Flywheel slows, and leaders become disheartened and lose momentum.

However, when an organization and its employees see results, the Flywheel sets in motion a positive, upward spiral of success. When organizations start to see their desired results, they focus on what is getting done instead of what isn't. When organizations focus on the positive impact of their employee's actions, they feel more motivated to repeat the behaviors that lead to achieving those desired results. So, the Flywheel begins to spin even faster.

No "Just-A's"

When I think of the Flywheel, especially the center and the hub, I can't help but think of my dad.

I recall at a gathering when someone asked my dad, "What do you do?" and he answered, "I work in healthcare."

A distant family member said mockingly, "Aren't you just a maintenance guy?" My dad was never easily ruffled. He just calmly turned to this man and said, "Oh no. There's no such thing as a "just-a" in healthcare!"

Not to be outdone, the sneering relative replied, "Oh, are you so worthwhile? Do you save anyone's life? Will anyone die if the maintenance guy doesn't show up to work? What are you now, some kinda brain surgeon?"

Everyone went silent in that circle. Especially me. Dad grew up on the streets of Brooklyn during the Great Depression, and was tough. I was nervous about his response. But my dad kept his calm and smiled. "No, I don't do brain surgery. But one of the things I do is maintain and test the hospital generators."

The grumpy relative stared at my dad with a confused look. My dad continued, "If I see myself as 'just-a' maintenance man, then maybe I wouldn't take that task seriously. After all, as you said, it isn't brain surgery. But suppose I shrugged off that task, and the generators weren't properly maintained, fueled, and tested. Those generators wouldn't do their work when the power goes off unexpectedly. The people doing that brain surgery you just mentioned might have some trouble using their ventilators, equipment, and tools. Maybe someone could die."

The room was silent. Dad continued, "Yes. I take what I do seriously. There's no 'just-a's' in healthcare. We are all different rungs on the same ladder. The fifth rung isn't more important or less so than the fourth rung. No one can climb if any of us are missing in action."

There was no microphone during this conversation, but if there had been, it would have dropped. I often share this story in the presentations I give. It was pivotal in my life and a reminder for all of us. There's no such thing as a "Just-A" in healthcare. All of us do this great work because we want our experiences to be of purpose. By its very nature, all that is done in healthcare is worthwhile; at the end of the day, human beings have a deep need to make a difference.

Way before it was so eloquently worded as "Purpose, Worthwhile Work, and Making a Difference," my dad was already living it, as were so many others before and since. After all, a model rarely invents anything. It usually just creates a visual of what many of us already knew to be true in our hearts.

My dad was so passionate about healthcare that he and several colleagues from across the organization formed "The Image Committee." Its purpose was to represent employees diversely and collaboratively through charitable work and engagement. They had employee fairs, picnics, and fundraisers to help those in need.

To address a significant nursing shortage, this committee created a scholarship fund for employees or their direct family members to attend nursing school, with the agreement they would work for the hospital after graduation. My dad was one of the primary movers of this initiative. In between construction projects, painting, plumbing work, generator maintenance, and leading his team, my dad, the maintenance foreman, was helping to address a nursing shortage.

In late 1989, my dad was diagnosed with terminal cancer. They said he had a year, maybe two, to live.

Some of us have had to hear those words about a loved one. It's never easy, and you're never ready. I was 22 years old at the time, and the "Batman" career, let's say, hadn't panned out. After returning from NYC (I'd moved there after graduating high school), I worked as a waiter, painting houses, and in nightclubs as a bartender.

I spent most of my evenings working and most of my days helping to take care of my dad. My dad took care of everyone and had only called out sick three times since 1968. That person, my dad, now needed me to take care of him. I had never done that before, and while I've worked since I was 10 years old with my first job mowing neighbors' lawns for \$3, I had never felt so good as when I was helping with my dad. I felt like I was doing something real, significant, and genuinely purposeful.

I fed him and bathed him. Sometimes I read to him, and other times I just sat with him at his bedside. All in the very hospital he loved so much.

They had to put a sign on the door because visitors were nonstop. Everyone came to see Jack. The hospital president came daily, as did the CNO and the CFO. EVS, facility operations, food service, nurses, and security staff also came. All the people I saw growing up, familiar faces and new ones. They were as diverse as you can imagine in many ways. But they were all there for the same reason.

Love.

They loved my dad. How could you not? This man who lived purpose, who made everyone feel that their work was worthwhile, and who made a difference. After all, when you think of it, the whole center of the Flywheel could just say one word:

“Love.” And we’d all still “get it.”

One day one of his nurses came in while I was cleaning up my dad, and she helped me finish. She paused as she looked me in the eyes and said, “I’ve been watching you these past weeks. You’d make an excellent nurse, you know!”

Without missing a beat, my dad looked up and said, “Maybe he’ll listen to you. I’ve been telling him for years!” And he had. But I never thought that would be possible. After all, I was the kid who spent most of my life in “the corner” (aka “The Batcave”). Nursing? Me? No, that’s never going to happen.

But my dad and I talked long into that night about my future, and he assured me if I wanted it bad enough, I could do it. Not only that, I could even go to nursing school for free because of the program he helped put into place many decades before. So I began that journey.

The nursing school even named a scholarship after my dad, which they graciously made me the first recipient of, and that offset the cost of books and scrubs, and even my first stethoscope. He got to see that happen. The academic part of nursing school didn’t come easily to me. Especially the math. But my dad used to tell me, and as I sit here typing these words, I can almost hear his voice, “If you want it bad enough, you’ll find a way to get the skills, then you’ll start making progress which is going to make you want it even more.”

So many years later, when I came to work for Huron, I realized that that’s the outside of the Flywheel. It starts with Passion (You want it!), then it

moves to Action (You learn what to do and how to do it. You take action). Then you start making progress (Results) which excites you and makes you want it even more (Passion)! This Flywheel keeps spinning because you want it, you learn how to do it, you start seeing results, and you want it even more!

On October 11, 1990, the hospice nurse caring for my dad called me as I walked into my apartment. I had just left his bedside at home after having bathed him. She simply said, “Come back, honey. Your dad is going.”

On the drive there, I turned the radio on. The Elton John song “Rocketman” came on, and the refrain repeated, “...and I think it’s gonna’ be a long, long time” as I pulled into the driveway. I opened the front door to my parents’ house and could hear my mom crying. My oldest brother stood like a sentinel at my dad’s door, waiting. When he saw me, he quietly shook his head.

Dad was gone. He was 59. I just missed his last moment. The hospice nurse would later tell me how often they wait until someone leaves to finish their journey. And now, I’ve seen it many times in my career, caring for those about to transition. Perhaps you have, as well. I sat with him. He looked so peaceful. I took my time. This time was sacred.

Sacred. That’s a word to sit with, isn’t it? It’s a good one to describe who and what we are in healthcare. What we do is truly sacred. After all, it is usually a person in healthcare who is the first to touch you as you enter this world, and it is often a person in healthcare who is the last to touch you as you leave this world. Our hands touch the sacred.

So much heart goes into healthcare. Sometimes our hearts are full. Other times our hearts are broken. But “heart;” that’s another word to sit with. There’s a lot of heart that goes into this work.

On the drive home the next day, I sat in silence, and then, needing some distraction, I turned on the radio. “Rocketman” came on again. I pulled over as I listened to Elton John’s beautiful voice sing to me, reminding me, as I decided to take it, that I would see my dad again someday, a long, long time from then. And I finally allowed myself to cry. He wasn’t “just-a” dad. He was my hero.

My dad’s funeral was standing room only. I saw so many familiar faces and so many new ones. They say over 500 people came that day. They all told me stories about “Jack.” They loved him.

I gave his eulogy. At 22, it was the first public speech I ever gave, and I had my dad’s name badge in my pocket. Funnily enough, I speak for a living

now and often still carry that name badge. It's sitting with me as I type these words. It's the only thing I asked my mom for after Dad passed away.

They named a street after my dad at the hospital he loved so much. I got to be there when they unveiled it. I was at work that day as an R.N. at the very place my dad had worked so many years before.

I've been a nurse since 1993. I've worked in pediatric oncology, PICU, and trauma ICU. Then I became a healthcare leader as a clinical manager of an ER. I then became a director of risk management and patient safety before coming to Huron as a coach in 2007. Now I speak full-time all over North America at conferences, hospitals, and healthcare organizations. I've written three books related to healthcare leadership, engagement, and nursing.

I learned a lot about being a leader from my dad. I've continued to learn and grow as I've had the absolute privilege of coaching and working with healthcare leaders and executives for the last 16 years. While they are all unique, I found one commonality in every leader I've encountered. They all have a story. They all have something that drove them, or as I say, called them, to healthcare.

Sacred Work

We get into healthcare for big reasons because we know that what we do is more than "just-a" job. It is worthwhile work. It is truly SACRED. I hope you'll keep your "big reason" front and center as you read. I do not doubt that you've already thought about it by now, probably before you even opened this book. After all, you wouldn't even be here if you didn't already feel a calling, a pull, a deep desire to be better, to be more, to be excellent.

There will be some ideas in these following chapters you've heard before, and there will be some new ones. We are striving for both timeless and timely. Underline, circle, and write notes to yourself. See yourself in each word and page; if you feel so moved, share this book with another leader. Maybe a newer one. It might help them. That's what we are all on this journey for anyway, to help. Let this book answer questions and create more conversations and dialogue.

Hopefully, you'll get some great results from what you learn here. Hopefully, you'll become a better leader and, dare I say, maybe even a better person.

Right now, as you finish this page, you are two leaders. The leader you are now and the one you are becoming. My sincere hope is that we help you a little on that journey of “becoming.”

I am reminded of these very wise words:

“Each of us has that right, that possibility, to invent ourselves daily. If a person does not invent herself, she will be invented. So, to be bodacious enough to invent ourselves is wise.”

Maya Angelou

May your journey of invention be a bodacious one.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rich Bluni, RN". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rich Bluni, R.N.

Huron Senior Director, Author, and Speaker