The ACS-STS Health Policy Leadership Course was a highlight of my professional development efforts to date. To give some context to this statement, I have participated in a number of leadership courses, including most recently, the Yale School of Management’s Emerging Leaders Program. The Heller Schools program stands out as being among the highest yield, most understandable and relevant. From the moment that Jon Chilingerian started the first course off with a really funny joke, I knew that the course was going to provide relevant information that was accessible! Each time that Jon presented his material, he would sprinkle in a number of pearls, that I found to be really insightful and relevant to my current and potentially future roles as a surgeon/leader. Some of the pearls were Jon’s others he shared from respected colleagues and influences in his life. Some salient examples include:

- The difference between a manager and a leader: The manager tells people to do things they don’t want to do. A leader gets people to want to do things that need to be done. The leader is not fooling the team members under their charge, but getting them to understand why things are important and making them a part of the process.

- The truth is simply another argument in a group discussion. This is both a disconcerting reality and a challenge. As a part of a car racing group case (which turned out to be data surrounding the Challenger disaster) the class was divided into two groups. Both groups made their arguments. One group had figured it out, which was great. However, they influenced very few of the people from the other group. Interestingly, when the case was broken down by the moderator, the key data was being presented by the correct group, yet they were unable to persuade the opposing side. For me this was a great example of this concept, and the responsibility that goes along with representing your position until your points are accepted, because the consequences of being right…but being alone in your support for a directive of move, can be disastrous.

- Separate facts from assumptions. This sounds simple enough, yet by their very nature, assumptions appear as facts at first. Challenge the facts to ensure that are in reality facts. For example, a promise of an incentive, without a contract, is not a fact. Challenge the assumptions, test their probability. Unchallenged assumptions undermine strategy and can negatively impact decision making.

- People prefer a flawed hypothesis, rather than reject or revise an assumption they believe to be true.

- The future is here, is it just not evenly distributed yet. This is a profound recognition that within our midst is the next great thing, but in need of support. It can also be demotivating for innovation, if one assumes the best solution has already been derived, and it is only a matter of time.
- There are 6 principles of persuasion (authority – not just power, but knowledge/experience, reciprocity, liking, social proof “one of us”, Consistency, Scarcity “fear of missing out”. Not every component is a part of every persuasive interaction or relationship, but each represent a pathway to influence a person.

- Monetary incentives can ultimately demotivate, particularly if they are unfair or intermittent. Unfair pay will almost certainly demotivate people. This does not mean you have to pay the most (because you want people to be working for more than just the money), but if you pay an unfair amount (which is to some degree a perception of the person under you) you would demotivate them. Fair pay is neutral. Incentive pay becomes the new “fair”, so if this goes away, then people will feel unfairly paid.

The class dynamics were great. The mix of participants brought together a diverse group of practices and interests, unified by their intelligence, thoughtfulness, and desire to become more effective. I felt the dialogue was sufficiently unstructured, to promote open discussions and tangential conversations of related topics, but not so unhinged that we wasted time going too far off base. This is a really tough balance and I felt all speakers did this amazingly well.

- An example that was particularly illustrative of the diverse group dynamics in action was a computer simulation in which we were charged with getting as much of the company on board with an idea as possible. Privately one of the team members had expressed a sense of being

The content was relevant and covered a number of really important topics that are difficult to grasp with currently available resources. The most prominent example is government based insurance. I have been at a number of presentations from the hospital level and national level where it is clear the speaker and the audience do not have a great grasp of the key nuances to government insurance and this deficit undermines their message. I have a comprehensive understanding of the different types of government insurance and sense for how the affordable care act impacts our ability to cover a range of citizens and the potential impact on the economy. I have a much better sense of the Medicare funding dilemma and the currently performance based approaches to curb the growth in spending.

The goal of these courses from the user is to gain perspective and insight that they do not currently possess, and were unlikely to develop intuitively. There were a number of specific points that I feel are directly applicable to my practice and my administrative roles.

What I would have more of:

- Brenda Anderson – It is truly amazing how information she could convey in a relatively painless and understandable way. Her exercise for understanding hospital financials was incredible. I am much more confident discussing hospital finances. I feel like I could take a class with her and learn essentially any aspect of economics. She is an absolutely incredible teacher.
Observation of group dynamics and function – a key component of the group exercises were how the members interact with one another. It can be very helpful to have one member pull out and simply observe how people are interacting (“grade their colleagues on effective communication styles). We had a lot of smart, perceptive people interacting in these groups and I suspect we could have provided each other with valuable insight.

What I would have less of:

The section on relational coordination was less obviously applicable to my practice and work environment. I think the concepts are good, but I did not find novel insights from this section that changed my thinking in this area.

The detailed description of government insurance was great, but I think there were a bit too many tangents. The personal stories make this material more understandable, yet some of the unprovoked tangents actually could be distracting.

Opportunities for curriculum enhancements for future courses

- More critique of group dynamics. This does not have to be personal (the moderator can come back and illustrate some challenges and some strategies to address them – that he or she observed during the exercise, not identifying the individual). This can be contained with the group session.
- Some more examples of why leaders or companies have been really successful
- Illustrations of people and companies that successfully reinvented themselves. The Polaride example is great of what can happen if you don’t, but more examples of leaders that did. If they could relate to medicine that would be great.