

TOP TEN LIST

TEN BEST WAYS TO BE A BAD PUBLIC HEALTH LEADER

With apologies to David Letterman, and thanks to the students in PHC 6537 at USF Spring 2011, and for editorial assistance to Elizabeth Kirby.

R.S. Kirby, January 2011

Number 10

Never come to meetings well-prepared, and never follow through.

Be sure to appear unorganized and forgetful, invite staff into your office and expect them to have done all your work for you.



Number 9

Don't put any effort into understanding the history, context, or complexity of any of the issues under consideration.

All it does is confuse the issue – making it more difficult to implement an ineffective solution that satisfies no one except the special interests and the electorate.



Number 8

Adopt an autocratic, domineering leadership style. Public health is a uniformed service, after all – so act like a military commander, issue commands and take decisive action.

Your staff will respect you, and you might be next in line for Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security.

Number 7

Communicate poorly, and never listen. Expect others to become galvanized into action by your own words, however convoluted your expressions of ideas may be.

To be truly ineffective, never provide agendas for meetings, spend interminable time reviewing minutes from meetings held months ago, and provide documents that serve as the basis for the meeting only after the meeting begins.

Top Ten List: Ten Best Ways to Do Be A Bad Public Health Leader

Number 6

Don't be a team player. Hold key information close to the vest. Make decisions based on what's best for your personal career rather than the agency or the constituencies you serve.

Delegate assignments* using the 'volun-told' method, but expect committee members to perform Herculean feats to complete these tasks.

*It doesn't matter whether you supervise these individuals – true leadership includes getting others to perform under your leadership.

Number 5

Stay in your office and let problems and issues come to your door.

No one ever solved a public health problem by working in the field, talking with practitioners serving affected populations or directly with members of the public.

Remember – “It’s cozy in here: we’re surrounded by layers of bureaucracy.”

Number 4

Never change. Those principles you learned during your MPH studies (if you happened to complete an MPH) are inviolate. No new theoretical or conceptual frameworks have emerged since then.

Adaptation is for fools – retirement or unemployment is for those who are unwilling to adapt, but you'll be respected at least for the five minutes while your health commissioner gives you a service award.

Number 3

Never be yourself. Your private life and personality should stay at home with your family behind closed doors.

Authenticity is for preachers, unemployed artists, poets and folksingers.



Number 2

Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Abuse your power, and those around you will be sure to perform as you desire.

In public health, collaborative leadership modalities are much more likely to achieve success, so adopt a self-serving, abusive approach and you will be much more likely to become a bad public health leader.

Top Ten List: Ten Best Ways to Do Be A Bad Public Health Leader

Number 1

The best way to be a bad public health leader is to have no vision of a future in which health outcomes are improved, health systems function more effectively, and the unmet needs of all, including the disadvantaged, are met in a timely and efficacious manner.

