



# The Penn Orthopedic Leadership Program: Training Surgeons as the Leaders of Tomorrow



John Kelly IV, MD

Leadership is simply the art of motivating others to realize a goal. Orthopedic surgeons are necessarily called to lead a health care team toward the singular goal of exemplary musculoskeletal care. We are the de facto ‘captain of the ship’ in surgery and in clinic and others look to us to exercise proper decision making. In addition, the achievement of any great organizational goal, be it philanthropic, research, surgical innovation or advocacy, requires effective leadership. Great leaders accomplish great things and can be agents of cataclysmic positive change. However, the ability to effectively lead is indeed a *skill* which can be learned.

Penn has enjoyed a rich tradition of training leaders in Orthopedic Surgery; many graduates have lead departments and served as program directors while others have helped develop new paradigms in research and clinical care. The Penn leadership legacy can be greatly enriched with targeted leadership training.

The Penn Orthopedic Leadership Program was conceived in order to equip our residents with the skills needed to realize their dreams and become positive agents of change for our esteemed vocation. While many great leaders have received ‘on the job training’, the *study* of leadership has evolved greatly and much is to be learned from formal educational training.

The Penn Leadership Program goal is to arm our graduates with skills necessary to effectively lead and realize their *professional and life* goals. The leadership curriculum is comprised of periodic leadership journal clubs, guest lecturers, and an annual leadership forum where local leaders share wisdom on topics such as team building, personal responsibility and execution of priorities.<sup>1</sup> The cornerstone of the curriculum is the Wharton spring retreat where residents receive highly relevant didactic sessions orchestrated by Dr. Mike Useem, the highly esteemed Director of the Center for Leadership and Change Management at Wharton.



**Figure 1.** Dr. Mike Useem, Director of the Center for Leadership and Change Management at Wharton, leading a discussion with the residents during the annual leadership forum.

By partnering with the Wharton School, we have developed a highly efficient curriculum for residents to: increase their emotional intelligence, appreciate the importance of integrity, develop a leadership identity, assist in building effective teams, and implement skills into their careers as the next generation of surgeon leaders. We truly believe the skills learned in our program can assist our young graduates to effectively lead the next generation of Orthopedic Surgeons at a time when leadership is needed most.



**Figure 2.** Residents participating in a team building and leadership exercise at last year’s annual leadership forum

Self-mastery is an imperative before one can effectively lead others. Thus, the leadership curriculum is replete with sessions on stress management, mindfulness, relationship building and proactivity. The attainment of *meaning* in work is emphasized so that joy and fulfillment can be cultivated.<sup>2</sup> In addition, efforts are underway to formulate ‘support groups’ and a more complete mentoring scheme where residents can confide in select attending surgeons when under excessive stress.

Indeed, it is an exciting time in our beloved program as we endeavor to equip our graduates with the tools necessary to live fulfilling lives and become agents of quantum change.

## References:

1. Willink, Jocko, and Leif Babin. *Extreme ownership: How US Navy SEALs lead and win*. St. Martin’s Press, 2017.
2. Collins, Jim. *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don’t*. Instaread, 2016.