



# Uncharted Territory

Thoughts on leadership  
by Karl Pister



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The human brain thrives on maps and predictability. Take away the ability to gauge surroundings, and panic soon sets in.

It has always intrigued me how certain Pacific Island cultures have worked to preserve the legacy of open-ocean navigation in the wide expanses of the South Pacific Ocean. With a deep knowledge of wave and wind patterns, combined with celestial, night-time navigation, these highly-skilled mariners can land on a small island in the literal middle of nowhere with astonishing accuracy.

I was recently in coastal Mexico and walked on the beach at night and marveled at the expanse of stars that for me are nothing but beautiful, but for a more skilled mind, are a practical roadmap for crossing thousands of miles of blank expanse.





I met with a surgeon the other day and he commented that he was entering into uncharted territory on a leadership assignment that he has been asked to undertake. I want to share parts of our discussion using the above metaphor of accurate navigation.

Many times in healthcare, highly trained and brilliant individuals, who are saving lives on a regular basis, are put in an awkward position of leading other people, which may be very much out of their comfort zone. Thought patterns and decision making capabilities in one arena are not necessarily wise to extrapolate to the leadership of people. Leadership is an acquired skill, just as much as any other endeavor. Sometimes that acquisition is new skill, while other times it is an increasing awareness of one's influence and wisdom, heretofore not acknowledged.

However, there are some basic principles that if followed, outstanding results can be predicted, in the same manner that if celestial navigation principles are followed, you will get to where you want to go.

Start with these...

*People want to be acknowledged for the value they bring to the organization*

*People respond when listened to*

*People want to be led by people whose values promote integrity and confidence*



*People want to be led by people who lead from the front by example, execution, and hard work*

*People want to feel passion. They want the foundation that persistence brings*

Now I find that it is easy to read a list like this and pass over it too casually, solely due to its simplicity. The more complicated, we sometimes think, the more the likelihood of meaning. But not generally the case.

So take the time to look at some questions that will promote some deeper thought around how your performance can be rated on these basics:

*Of your direct reports, how often, in the last month, have you noted accomplishments in a specific and focused way?*

*How would you rate how you listen? What measures do you use? How would the people you lead rate you? Are you willing to find out?*

*What are your core values? Do your people know those? Could they guess by your actions?*

*Are you an in-the-office administrator, or are you a 'leadership by walking around person'?*

*Do you use the excuse of a staggering meeting load to justify not being with your people?*

*Do you have the courage to check the status-quo of "I need to be in this meeting" and see if you actually do?*

*Do you have measurable results in key areas? Is your compassionate leadership underscored by a bulletproof record of accomplishment?*

*Are you passionate about what you do? Can you, as one of my outstanding clients stated, say that "we just showed up when we didn't have to"?*



Great leaders constantly review these simple basics, and teach them, by either example or formal curriculum, to the next level of leaders under their direction. It is a never-ending process.





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