



## What's Love Got to Do With It?

Ronald N. Riner, MD

These words from a title song by Tina Turner may sound like a strange opening to a commentary on business. However, I beg your indulgence to follow my train of thought for a brief moment.

Love is a great intangible. It is a word which has many definitions and connotations.<sup>1</sup> It contains many feelings which we crowd into those short four letters. Ah yes, love — a small word we often use for an idea so immense and so powerful it has altered the landscape of history, spawned works of art, cheered the downtrodden, turned bullies into meek lambs, consoled the disenfranchised and brought kings to their knees. At times we use the word so loosely that it can mean almost nothing or, alternatively, absolutely everything. For those of you who studied Latin you will recall it was probably the first conjugation you learned. Love, like truth, can be the unassailable defense. However, most of us would like to think of love as a positive force that enables one to climb mountains.

Enough said, let me go forward by defining the word as “having a strong affection for or a devotion toward someone or something”<sup>2</sup> and allow me the luxury of disregarding any sexual overtone for the remainder of my commentary.

As I have the privilege and pleasure of working with many health care professionals around the country, I can't help but be impressed with the frequently voiced feelings of futility, frustration and lack of

excitement about their work. It is no small feat to keep what we hold as tried and true beliefs in the tenets of the profession at the center of our present work life — a work life strung with life and death decisions cluttered with encumbrances, regulations and challenges to professionalism and the very ethic of the doctor-patient relationship. And yet, stated provocatively, it would appear that far too many of our colleagues in modern business life focus on a love of material products and organizational structure — not that these aren't important but that they become the centerpiece of all efforts needs to seriously be questioned.

The individual's ability to be creative and independently resourceful becomes very difficult to manifest in complex and onerous organizational structures — structures that attempt to commoditize very personal interactions between people under the mantra of efficiency and cost effectiveness. As more and more individuals who had previously been innovative and resourceful small business owners enter the corporate environs of a consolidating world, the tension between the creative components of one's character and profession and the necessities of corporate regimentation become more apparent. Indeed, the challenge for corporations and organizations in the 21st century may well be the ability to balance the need to generate stockholder value, earnings and profit with the ability to change, retain and honor the creativity and individuality of those who comprise the organization.

What's love got to do with it? — Simply everything. The truly successful and happy individual is one who has passion for their work. The word alone connotes emotion that stirs one to action. You need to do what is most important to you, and you need to espouse a spirit and an attitude that speaks to your task.

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Dr. Riner is President and CEO of the Riner Group, Inc., a professional advisory and healthcare management consulting firm offering services to physicians, healthcare systems and industry. A clinical cardiologist, he is a Fellow of the American College of Cardiology. He can be reached at 1034 S. Brentwood Blvd., Suite 1640, St. Louis, MO 63117. Phone (314) 727-7098; Fax (314) 727-2735; Web Page: HYPERLINK <http://www.rinergroup.com> [www.rinergroup.com](http://www.rinergroup.com); Email: [rriner@rinergroup.com](mailto:rriner@rinergroup.com)

If you are passionate about your work you will do everything you must to accomplish your goals.

Think back to those individuals outside of your immediate family who have had the greatest impact on your life. Odds are that at least one may have been a teacher or mentor that demonstrated a passion and love for their subject or profession — a passion and love that you found emulatable.

The fact of the matter is that those who have entered into the profession of medicine typically have done so for altruistic (some might say idealistic) reasons. This is not unnoticed. Indeed, even today with the encumberments of regulation and obtrusive third-party interference in clinical decision making and at times an adverse media, the medical profession is held in high esteem by “our customers” — the patients we serve. In large part this is because our patients recognize and expect the physician to be their advocate and to manifest an altruistic compassionate attitude.

In our current environment, the traditions of the medical profession are extremely important. What we do and how we do our professional work is important. Indeed, it will be important to us when we are patients ourselves. Our strength as a profession has been our ability to supercede the desire to engage in an interminable self — preoccupied monologue and to take the higher ground irregardless of politics or business contractual alignments. No, I'm not advocating for naivete, but I am attempting to make a point. Despite employment we are not our job descriptions or the small confining boxes those descriptions have made for us on an organizational chart. We are not just “specialists”, “primary care physicians” or “hospitalists”. We are not our profit and loss statements. Nor do we do ourselves justice by viewing ourselves and colleagues as ambitions or career prospects — the “providers” of services. As the Chinese sage Wei Wu admonished:<sup>3</sup>

Why are you unhappy?  
Because 99.9% of what you think,  
And everything you do,  
Is for yourself,  
And there isn't one.

Why are some of the new organizational structures and the numerous weird arrangements permeating the healthcare landscape such desperate wells of anxiety, stress, depression and failure? Because all their focus appears to be toward preserving and promoting the organizational identity, and for the most part they do not have an identity or at least one that patients and many of those working inside consider worth wanting or providing value.

Making these new structures viable and making medicine as a profession for the long term attractive to the best and brightest means reclaiming some of the qualities sacrificed at the altar of organizational survival and management motifs of the month. Successful organization and practice will be one that will be as concerned about what it serves as what it is. The successful organization and practice will have a passion and driving love for those it serves and that love will permeate the language, visage and symbols of the organization and those working therein. Please don't misunderstand. While I'm advocating for organizations to focus on those they serve, both internal and external, I am in no way mitigating the importance of structure. However, personal desire and motivation are just as important. It is precisely because we seek to higher goals (professional, financial and growth) that change comes about and we become motivated and animated. It is love and passion for our work that is the fuel for the attainment of these goals and it is love and passion for our work that links us to the interesting inner working of ourselves, our professions and our organizations.

*Nothing great in the world has been accomplished without passion.*

- George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

## REFERENCES

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2. *Webster's New 20th Century Dictionary*, Second Edition, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983.
3. Whyte D. *The Heart Aroused*. New York: Bantam Double Day Dell Publishing Group, Inc., 1994.