



Episode 13: Leadership is a Choice – the Decision is Yours
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Geoff: Hello, and welcome to "Taking the Lead," a podcast from the Radiology Leadership Institute that profiles radiologists as leaders, seeking insight and inspiration from a variety of perspectives and experiences. I'm Geoff Rubin. With this episode, we celebrate the one year anniversary of "Taking the Lead." Reflecting on the past year, I feel a deep sense of gratitude for the opportunity to connect with a truly remarkable group of radiology leaders, each one sharing their unique journey and the passions that drive them to tackle uncertainty within our everchanging healthcare environment, leading organizations, fellow physicians, and the field as a whole into the future.

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For this anniversary edition, we welcome back Dr. Geraldine McGinty, chair of the American College of Radiology's Board of Chancellors and guest extraordinaire from our very popular eighth episode. Geraldine will serve as a special guest host and will be speaking with Dr. Hedvig Hricak, who is the chair of Radiology at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York, and past president of the Radiological Society of North America. Without further delay, I will hand the microphone to Geraldine, to introduce our guest and our motivation for this very special conversation.

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Geraldine: I'm delighted to be here as a guest of Dr. Geoff Rubin, and guest-host the extremely successful RLI "Taking the Lead" podcast. I'm here with someone who really needs no introduction, Dr. Hedvig Hricak. Dr. Hricak is the chair of the department of Radiology at Memorial Sloan-Kettering. But I could take up our whole time talking about your luminary career heady, your 433 published articles, your five gold medals, your leadership of numerous societies including the Radiological Society of North America and the American Association of Women in Radiology. What I want to focus on this afternoon is really your leadership story and your approach to leadership. And what made me think that this would be a great conversation was the event that you curated at the 2019 European Congress of Radiology. It was a two-day interactive program titled Women in Focus, and you brought together male and female leaders in radiology industry, public health to discuss issues related to the gender gap in radiology and a number of other important issues that I hope we'll cover. But at the event, you said this needed to be more than a single session, what prompted you to create this event?

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Dr. Hricak: First of all, thank you very much for having me. It is really a pleasure. And I hope that the podcast will be helpful to both men and women as

we speak about leadership. About two years ago, I was interviewed by a medical student from UK, from England, and it was interesting as she was asking me questions, and I was answering things that I think every day for us everyday thing. I realized how she was becoming mesmerized by the answer then said, "Where can I read this?" This is what I want to hear and I said, "Well, you know, it's probably our responsibility in a way, as we go through our careers and life and as we really try to establish the path to leadership and what works and doesn't work to share that. When you mentor your own faculty, it still stays small, but when you put on a program such as Women in Focus, then you really have ability to share those views with much larger audience.

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Another thing my views are only one point of view. And this is why we had a number of leaders to share. And as you share something, you at the same time very fast realize you are not the only one with the problems. They are so similar and they are similar between genders, they are similar between countries. And something that maybe sometimes keep you awake at night, you start laughing about. So that's why I think it was a good...it did start as Women in Focus, but you participated, so you know and you were excellent on your panel and your comments. But it turned out to really be equal for both genders. And not only that, another thing was diversity. It isn't just about women and men, it isn't just about gender. It's really respecting diversity, respecting different cultures, and you learn, you really learn. I think I learned much more than I gave and for that, I'm very grateful to the organizers.

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Geraldine: Well, it was really an inspiring, and as you said, you brought together people from many different countries and many different perspectives. Were there any of the discussions or any of the positions of the participants that surprised you?

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Dr. Hricak: What surprised me a little bit, it was actually a very positive surprise. How honest were the speakers talking about their problems? How leadership, especially as we're looking at women has changed and it's okay to say, I am a woman, I care and I really want to lead that way. Yes, I was surprised by the honesty and personal stories that some of the speakers shared. And I was also surprised how for many speakers, this was their very first time that they said yes to a topic and the research, the depths of research that they did for the presentation, it was yes, I shouldn't say I was surprised, I was so happy.

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Geraldine: I think that I learned some of your story that I hadn't known before. Talk to us a little bit about your leadership journey, about some of the things that perhaps people might not know about you that go beyond the weight of your CV and the enormity of your accomplishments.

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Dr. Hricak: It's difficult to talk about myself. I think that one thing I did, I know what you are referring to, I did always wanted to be in charge. That's why Geraldine is laughing. Because I just like, for whatever reason, I really do like to be able to lead. But in a way, by doing that, it's to help put into effect a vision because you can have a dream, but unless somebody offers a resource, plan, how to do it, it will always stay a dream. So you do need always be surrounded by people that are going to help you to lead and execute. That's why if you see on my shelf, my faculty gave me that I'm a walking Excel spreadsheet, because I next done, next done, next. So that's how life goes on.

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Geraldine: But I think an interesting insight that you shared and that many people during the Women in Focus event shared was that their careers had not necessarily always taken a straight line, and I think I'd be interested to hear you share some of the insights about when we have to sometimes take a diversion or do something different for a while.

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Dr. Hricak: You know, we all are striving towards balance between work and family. And I like to say you can really, regardless, if you are a man or a woman, you can have it all, but not at the same time. I know there are a few that are able to do that. I was not one of them. I was not able to have a small child and work 24/7 and give it all. So what may be a surprise to many, I actually stayed at home for three years when my son was born. I didn't go to work, he was about three and a half when I went back to work. And I was in this country already. My goal of the day at 1:00 is to watch "Days of our Lives." That was my...never missed. And I like being calm and I really cherish that time. But then when I went back, then really my residency, I went back to residency, job and all the calls and, you know, especially junior resident, today we all share calls equally. At that time, juniors were not sharing equally. And those were not easy calls. But then I went back to...

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Geraldine: What is something about your leadership that might surprise people?

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Dr. Hricak: I don't think it's as much of a surprise, as it is an example how no journey is straight and no journey is easy. An example is when just about is Alex and I were to move to New York, it wasn't easy.

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Geraldine: A big job for you to take coming on as chair of Memorial Sloan-Kettering and you've talked in the past about this was really your dream job.

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Dr. Hricak: Yes, it was.

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Geraldine: You identified cancer as a focus. And so this was your dream job.

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Dr. Hricak: Yes. It really was and it really is. But Alex had quadruple bypass.

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Geraldine: As you were coming into this big job.

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Dr. Hricak: On Monday that we were supposed to move.

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Geraldine: What was going through your mind at that point? Did you think about not coming to start the new job?

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Dr. Hricak: Actually, I did. And he encouraged me so I postponed coming for one week. He was well, I left him with a friend and family came. I came to New York. I didn't tell anybody. And for about five weeks, I actually commuted. I commuted between New York and San Francisco. I left every Friday at 4:00 to catch the late flight, the Friday afternoon, so to New York and I took the red-eye every Sunday and came here in the morning and just the life was going on, it really was a need.

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Geraldine: We've talked before about whether women are harder on ourselves. If you were your best own friend, would you've given yourself the same advice

to show up to a brand new job with Your beloved husband tackling a major health crisis at home in San Francisco?

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Dr. Hricak: You know, it's such a good question. Today, knowing what I know, I would probably say no. Call them and delay for four weeks, six weeks. But when you are very young, when you are determined not to fail, you put sometimes your own barriers and your own difficulties. It's the lesson we learn and this is why you need mentors. I would come home from work, and yes, I cried plenty. It wasn't easy, it was difficult because it is something for the first, I didn't know how to do really. It was a brand new environment. I lived in San Francisco for 18 years and coming to New York was very different. Culture especially was a big difference as UCSF is truly an academic institution, Memorial is a hybrid.

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It's a hybrid between outstanding clinical care and academia. So everything was different. And I didn't have friends, I had my sister. Thank God for that. But no, it wasn't easy, but it just shows you that life is not easy and don't give up. Like Churchill said, "If it's worthwhile thinking about it every day, do it." And knowing it's not easy, knowing it's not a straight line. It's difficult. Some people scream, some people cry, some people gain weight. There are many different things that we do in order to help us go through. It's difficult, but yes, you'll do if you're determined to do. So it just shows your determination, perseverance, and believing that this was the right choice. Never look back. Sometimes you make whatever decision it is and then you think why. And I certainly did examine myself. Why? Why did I need? But that why doesn't really help you? You did it and move on.

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Geraldine: Thank you for sharing that, incredibly powerful story and I think no regrets, obviously, but it shows, as you said, the importance of mentors and certainly, the importance for our emerging leaders to learn from the valuable lessons that we get from luminaries in the profession like you.

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Dr. Hricak: Oh, yeah, well, that lesson I hope, you know, but it has to repeat.

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Geraldine: Looking at your logic, gynecologic cancers, developing new imaging techniques, was that something that you saw at the beginning of your

career? Did you foresee yourself sitting in this office here at Memorial Sloan-Kettering as you started out?

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Dr. Hricak: No. Not at all. Probably, the reason I started with GU and at that time, it was the IVU or IBPN cystograms, and I still remember I would take everybody's rotation just so I can be on the IVP rotation with people where the resident co-workers were very happy to give it up. One, it started at 7:00 in the morning.

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Second, many people consider it boring and I loved it. But it also probably was the influence of my first mentor. The very first chair I ever worked for was a GU radiologist. So I went to GU radiology and interestingly, and the same residency program. Many people today will not remember was Richard Pfister before me, who then went to MGH and really was a big GU person. So I think that as a chair, as a leader, you really influence your junior resident and both Richard and I obviously went to GU and I don't think it's an accident. We just learned how to really appreciate playing fields.

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Geraldine: You have shaped the careers of so many radiologists. Tell me some of the other people who shaped your career.

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Dr. Hricak: So that was the first one for GU and then I was really, sometimes I think I'm really, really lucky. Some other people look at me and say, "Well, you always recognize the opportunity and you took it." But when I was for my fellowship at Henry Ford Hospital, Dr. William Eyler was my chair and it is correct. I just saw the opportunity for mentor. They don't make them anymore. You very rarely in your life have the privilege to meet somebody like Dr. Eyler. Extremely devoted. He was editor of radiology for many, many years. And she appreciated that I was so hungry for research and academia and academic radiology, and he really took the time to mentor.

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Geraldine: Was he a mentor or a sponsor? The session that I was fortunate to participate in during the Women in Focus event was on mentorship and paying it forward. It sounds as if you really actually put opportunities your way.

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Dr. Hricak: Yes. At that time ultrasound was starting. And he was not an ultrasound sonographer, he was a chest person. But I really wanted to do something in ultrasound. He showed me the way. He said if you really want when the modality develops, you need a perspective study. There was nothing to review. So he pointed me to apply for grant, I was at Henry Ford Hospital to Ford Foundation. He worked with me. I would write a paper and then he would review and usually it was all red, but it was okay. I was learning. So he did facilitate, but he did mentor tremendously. So I think it was both facilitator and mentor. We were very large faculty and we didn't have too many that were really interested in research. And he really spent with us that were interested in research and academia, he spent a lot of...

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Geraldine: Tell me about your own mentoring style. What kind of mentor are you.

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Dr. Hricak: I am what kind of a mentor...

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Geraldine: I might be able to answer that one because we've started working together on a project and I think you're a very effective mentor. Lots of good feedback, but high expectations.

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Dr. Hricak: Yeah, tough love. I really enjoy mentoring. It's really helping people achieve what they want to achieve. But yes, you're right. The bar is high, but so much for Dr. Eyer. I mean, you know the story. He made me rewrite my first paper 21 times and that was before computers. I retyped 21 times because I was ashamed to show him just corrections. So I think when you mentor, when you tell somebody when they really do well. But then at the same time you say, you know, this can be done better. This should be done this way. It's okay. Because if you always only approve, I don't think sometimes you learn much more when you don't do things really well. I think one of the...I really love people and I truly like people and love people I mentor. And since now I am in this business for many, many, many years, and many of my mentees, very successful chairs all over the world, very successful professors all over the world. They all keep in touch. I keep going for their birthday parties, sometimes for their retirement parties.

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But it's obviously whatever was happening, or has been happening in my mentorship, I keep such close contact with them forever. Once somebody is your mentee, you mentor them for a period of time till they make it or they achieve what they want. But they always stay in touch. They always said, what do you think? Should I take this job? Should they go for an interview? So they always stay in touch and I think the results speak for themselves. But yes, it's not...

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Geraldine: The expectations are high and that's appropriate. I wanna talk a little bit about the journey to becoming a chair. Radiology Leadership Institute really seeks to help radiologists, think about how they might pursue leadership and clearly, your academic leadership is only one facet of what you do as a chair. Can you talk a little bit about that journey and what it felt like to become a chair and take on that responsibility?

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Dr. Hricak: We talk about that. Whatever you decide in life, I think it is very important the decision is yours. If you do want that position, to be a chair or to lead, you have to understand the consequences that are going to come with hard work. Not everything is rosy always. You can be derailed, there are disappointments, but you know what you want and you persevere. I always did want, I ever had my lab. Then I was a section head and I wanted to be a chief. Not to please anybody, but I really want to try if I would like it enough. So I start interviewing chairmanship relatively early in my low, mid-40s. And at that time, that was very unusual.

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And then I realized very soon that I actually only like oncology. I was offered some other positions in a general academic place, and I realized my passion is really oncology and there were only two places. I had my eye on it and that was MD Anderson or Memorial. Memorial position came up first, and I interview and that's why I'm here. MD Anderson came, I was here already for two years and there was no way out, there was no reason for me to change. So I knew I wanted to be a chair, I did know I only want oncology and I was lucky enough when I interviewed that they took me.

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Geraldine: I'm thinking that luck had very little to do with it. We hear a lot of discussion of imposter syndrome and you talked about starting early. Where did that confidence come from?

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Dr. Hricak: Oh, I was confident. When I became a chair here, I think I was more afraid of myself. I was not confident at all. I tried to play and to do my best, but it wasn't easy at all. It was not. And sometimes, we all...you're afraid of yourself. You just think, what if I cannot do? I don't know how to do. I was never trained how to do. So slowly, you gain confidence, very slowly. It's not overnight, and the confidence usually comes through successes. I love writing grants. So to me life is an auto one grant. You have your hypotheses, you have your specific games, you know how to execute and you go for it. Some people would say organized, and I did know what I want to achieve. And it was one step at a time, but it wasn't easy. Actually, when my husband wrote his first book "Be in Charge," you're going to see in a very small caption, "Chiefs Don't Cry." Because I didn't cry. When I came home at the very beginning, I think what I did the most was cry. And then slowly, I stopped crying. But it wasn't easy at all.

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Geraldine: I think it's so instructive, especially for people who aren't just far along or were accomplished in their career to hear about those moments of uncertainty. What kind of missteps have you seen junior colleagues make that you would love to say, either cut yourself some slack or don't do that again?

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Dr. Hricak: Well, I think one of the most difficult thing is to really have emotional intelligence. People very often give up too fast, too soon. Have confidence in yourself and perseverance, hard work does pay off at the end. So that would be one. Another one that's specially for women and I know it because I did it to myself is we create our own reality. We put our own barriers sometimes, and that was very well-discussed at our Women in Focus. I was very, really happy to see that I am not the only one that feel that way, and then that see that, but we create very often. Why? I don't know. I think it will change with newer generations, I think they're much more confident, but you never know. Because we'll see how they do when they start working. Right now, they're at the beginning, like Generation Z, which we say it's totally gender blind, but they don't have scars yet. We have our scars over time. So we create. So it's emotional intelligence, which is extremely important. Don't give up. And actually, personally, I always say never waste a crisis. Every crisis is an opportunity. So grab it and run with it, and it will shake you up. And I will shake them very often, but everything in my life was always an opportunity. And sometimes looking back sometimes when I was told no, it's actually was good for me because I thought really hard, how to turn it around and play to win, not to whine.

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Geraldine: Winning, not whining. You very appropriately included both male and female leaders. But going back to that idea of creating our own reality, do you think there are differences in the expectations for women leaders?

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Dr. Hricak: Sometimes we talk about that. And the question is, and I don't know the answer, and I don't have the answer. But do we feel that we have to do even better than our male partner, the chair, co-chair, chairs? Is it because we feel that way or is it because we truly have to do that in order to be appreciated? I don't know. But I do know because it happened to me as well. You are in a big board meeting, and you really have a good idea. And you say what you think and nobody hears. And then the guy across the table says the same thing. And oh, yeah, this is really...so it happens. Is it our voice? Are we creating our own reality? And that's why very often you see women repeating themselves, and the reason they repeat so they would be heard. So we are doing much better. We have many more women in leadership position, and will that change as we have more women? I already see the change, but some of the old habits are definitely there. So you cannot be overly aggressive, because then you have a certain name. You cannot be too passive, because oh yeah, she's timid. So it's not an easy line to walk.

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Geraldine: So you said that you were inspired to create the Women in Focus event by a conversation with a medical student. What would you today tell the medical student at the University of Zagreb, looking ahead for her career? What advice would you give her?

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Dr. Hricak: Never give up. Go for your dreams. You know, dreams are wonderful. And always remember, it's such a cliché, but everything in life is a journey. It's not a destination, because maybe somebody in Croatia or anywhere, they, number one, want a residency in the United States, then at no time, they'll want fellowship. And your dreams will always change, but never give up and always have a dream and go for it. You can do it, and only you can do.

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Geraldine: Hedvig, thank you so much for this conversation.

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Dr. Hricak: You're very welcome. Thank you.

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Geoff: Okay, that's it for this time. Thank you for listening. If you've enjoyed this podcast, I invite you to do three easy things. Subscribe to the series so you can never miss an episode. Share the link so your peers can listen too, and like or rate every episode, so more people will discover it. Please join me next month when I speak with Dr. Sanjay Shetty, Executive Vice President for Corporate and Business Development at the Steward Healthcare System in Dallas, Texas. Following completion of a radiology residency and musculoskeletal imaging fellowship at the Massachusetts General Hospital in 2006, Dr. Shetty practice radiology in the Boston area while earning an MBA and graduating first in his class at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.

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Within two years of graduation, he became Chair of Radiology at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Boston, serving in that role for three years before becoming President of the Steward Healthcare Network, the second-largest physician network in Massachusetts. Three years after that, he began his current role as Executive Vice President, and a key member of the senior leadership team at the Steward Healthcare System, which is the largest private taxpaying hospital operator in the United States, comprising 37 community hospitals across 9 states and the country of Malta, serving over 800 communities with more than 42,000 employees.

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In 2012, Sanjay was recognized by the Boston Business Journal as one of Boston's 40 under 40 for civic and business leadership, and in 2013, by Becker's Hospital and Healthcare Review as one of 25 national healthcare executives designated as rising stars under 40. In addition to his rich palette of leadership and management responsibilities, Dr. Shetty continues to practice radiology as associate clinical professor at Tufts University School of Medicine in Boston, Massachusetts. I hope that you will join us for a remarkable journey through Sanjay's career and the story of his role within a highly innovative and rapidly evolving provider of integrated healthcare.

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technical support, and Shane Yoder for our theme music. Finally, thank you, our audience, for listening and for your interest in radiology leadership. I'm your host, Geoff Rubin from Duke University. We welcome your feedback, questions, and ideas for future conversations. You can reach me on twitter @GeoffRubin or the RLI, @RLI_ACR. Alternatively, send us an email at rli@acr.org. I look forward to you joining me next time on "Taking the Lead."