

John Deffenbaugh blog – Tell them you care

iPhone5 has been in the news recently. I declare an interest, not in the recent version, but rather in being a recent convert to Apple. I went from paper diary and standard Nokia to iPhone over Christmas, got an iPad for my birthday in Feb, and then when my home PC crashed in March, got an iMac. I am very conscious of the perils of being a reformed smoker (which I am not), that you can be evangelical about something. Rather than being evangelical, let me draw out three lessons that I think Top Leaders can take from iPhone5.

First is **innovation**. Those attending the Masterclass with Patrick Miley heard about his development of Aquapacer. I helped get Patrick the patent for his product. He sadly lost it when his equity was diluted and the patent was part of the company. Apple is a hugely innovative company. It has not only redefined the computer market, but also music, telephones and most recently publishing. It brings to mind the observation by Maya Angelou, the author and civil rights activist:

You can't use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have.

Apple was right to protect their innovation. As was James Dyson. Forcing others to innovate makes change happen faster, rather than just 'me-too'. Conversely, there is also the open-ness of adoption. As Pablo Picasso observed:

Good artists copy, great artists steal.

So there is the tension of protection v spread and adoption. The NHS is in the latter camp, which gets onto the second lesson for Top Leaders.

This is **integration**. Apple's latest iPhone is pretty much the same as the first. No huge leap in innovation, but rather incremental steps – albeit pretty significant ones. And continuous focus on the customer experience. Using an iPod, iPhone, iPad and iMac, it's so simple. How does it work in using community care, primary care, secondary care and tertiary care? Ok, we'll hear the arguments in 'we're different', but those of you who have attended the Core Programme and listened to Julie Bailey cannot help but be moved by the impact of the customer experience. Hers was about lack of integration (among other things) in secondary care, but the message is the same.

I expect that Francis II will present some pretty big challenges. In reacting to them, Top Leaders would do well in reflecting on what George Bernard Shaw said in Mrs Warren's Profession:

People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and if they can't find them, make them.

Which leads me to the final point of the iPhone5 message for Top Leaders: **selfishness**. At this point I put my faculty and consultant hat on and observe what I see about Top Leaders using their iPhones and other smartphones. I generalise, but NHS leaders lack in self-awareness when it comes to meetings and interactions with their colleagues. They're not as bad as what I observed when I worked in South Africa – face-to-face meetings there were virtual in that anybody would answer a phone in a meeting and just engage in conversation. And this was before smartphones, so I'd hate to think what it's like now.

Top Leaders will not give a second thought to getting out their iPhone or Blackberry in the middle of a meeting and checking emails, dealing with stuff or generally giving the signal that they'd rather be somewhere else. This says to me: "I'm not here", "You're not important", "I have better things to do". And don't try and tell me that 'this is the way we do things around here'. Indeed, if it is, then the game's a bogey. Might as well throw in the towel and head home now, cause that QIPP stuff really isn't that important after all, or indeed the patient. It will have the impact of George Bush Sr looking at his watch in his debate with Bill Clinton, or Barack Obama going walkabout with Mitt Romney (don't get me started).

So who will tell you that you're a selfish git? Your colleagues. As Prof Randy Pausch of Carnegie Mellon observed in his Last Lecture:

When you're screwing up and nobody is saying anything to you anymore, that means they gave up. When you see yourself doing something badly and nobody bothers to tell you anymore, that's a very bad place to be. Your critics are the ones telling you they still love you and care.

You may not want to hug your colleague, but tell them you care.

John Deffenbaugh 25 Oct 2012