

Foreword

MOST PEOPLE FROM racial and ethnic minority groups grow up hearing exactly the same messages about how to be successful in America. “Work hard!” In fact, we learn to expect to work twice as hard as everyone else. “Treat others with respect”—even when you don’t receive the same respect. And my personal favorite: “Act with integrity and be true to your word.”

I believe strongly in these virtues. Yet, in my experience, more is required of racially and ethnically diverse professionals to reach and lead at the top level in an organization. Diane L. Dixon, EdD, has been curious for decades about the “more” to which I refer. In *Diversity on the Executive Path: Wisdom and Insights for Navigating to the Highest Levels of Healthcare Leadership*, she explores whether racial and ethnic minorities confront more challenges than their majority counterparts do in entering the C-suite. Her research is substantive and validates some truths known by those of us who have successfully worked through these barriers.

Is leadership diversity in healthcare as critical now? This is an important conversation to have—truthfully and without judgment. With a small number of racially and ethnically diverse professionals rising to all levels of leadership in all facets of the healthcare field, a prevailing thought seems to be that we’ve moved past the need to focus on advocating for the growth of diverse leadership in management. I disagree. According to the American Hospital Association’s Institute for Diversity and Health Equity, only 9 percent of hospital CEOs are minorities. At best, this is

a static number that does not reflect the racially and ethnically diverse talent in the field or the communities served by healthcare organizations across this country. At worst, it is a number less than what it was just a couple of years ago.

Throughout her book, Dr. Dixon underscores the fact that diverse leadership is vital to the success of healthcare organizations and that we must have this difficult discussion, hire diverse leaders, create a diverse pipeline, and focus on retention and succession. Diverse representation at all levels, and particularly in governance and the C-suite, guides diversity in decision-making, strengthens healthcare through innovation and enhanced quality, and improves the equity in that care. Further, diversity of thought yields the best strategies and the best solutions.

Fortunately, Dr. Dixon goes beyond identifying the value of leadership diversity and the challenges to attaining it. She shares characteristics and competencies needed to achieve and thrive in executive roles. Although I continue to take advantage of opportunities to share my journey with professionals and students seeking advice and mentorship, I can touch only a limited number of people. Through this book, Dr. Dixon has compiled a road map to success that allows anyone interested in an ambitious career path in healthcare to explore strategies—and, most importantly, to build the leadership acumen that goes beyond the traditional requirements. She helps us look at the skills required to navigate in a society laced with unconscious and conscious color and ethnic bias.

One of the prevailing themes examined in this book is relationships—building them to bridge the gap and nurturing them through mentorship. As the CEO of CommonSpirit Health, the nation's largest nonprofit health system, I appreciate the complexity of the journey to the C-suite for members of underrepresented minority groups, as well as what it takes to sustain a successful career as a healthcare executive. In my more than 40 years in healthcare, I learned long ago the power of establishing authentic relationships by finding common ground with those who are different from yourself.

I wish the world were different now, but it isn't. I wish we could move past focusing on the need for diversity, but we can't. That is why I am particularly appreciative to Dr. Dixon for advancing this important discussion. Her research validates findings and provides real options to parlay what may otherwise feel like a stagnant career into one with a trajectory to a top management position.

—Kevin E. Lofton, FACHE
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