# CAP at 75 - Leading by Mentoring

December 3, 2021

**Julie McDowell:**

Welcome to the CAP's CAPcast series celebrating our 75th anniversary. In this episode, we talk about past presidents, Doctors Sodeman and Williams. Dr. Sodeman was president from 2005 to 2007, and Dr. Williams was president from 2017 to 2019.

Dr. Sodeman appointed Dr. Williams to one of his first leadership roles in the CAP. Leadership in the CAP changes over time and so does the role of the president. What changes did you see during your time on the board and as president, Dr. Sodeman, can we hear from you to begin with?

**Dr. Thomas Sodeman:**

Yes, I guess your question is one of leadership and the role of a president. President is not responsible for the daily operation of the College that's left to the CEO. The president however, is an advocate not only for pathologists but for the success of the CAP. The CEO is really responsible to the board for the operation and the financial status of CAP. At the College, the president is the chairman of the board. This is not always the case in organizations, but since the president holds both the president's position and the board chairman position in the College, the CEO position does end up reporting to the president. And so both the CEO and the president become held responsible for CAP.

As the president, you assume a responsibility for the membership involvement in advancing pathology and the role of the CAP. The leadership during my presidency didn't change. The responsibilities that I assumed at the beginning were the same as at the end. As the chairman of the board, the president assumes the responsibility for carrying out board policy and to provide a leadership role. Many people forget that one of the primary roles of the president really is as chairman of the board. The president does not work independent from the board, but the president needs to review the effectiveness of the board and assure that the board actions are carried out. As the president, you publicly represent the College, but within the College, you represent the board. The board structure when I came on had been stable for many years and I felt as did the strategic planning committee that restructuring and strengthening membership involvement would assure a more successful College.

As an example, over the time CAP had grown to become a major player in pathologist education and a growing activity in both anatomic and laboratory activities. The board needed to restructure to better reflect those activities. To accomplish this, the councils and the committees had to be expanded. New councils had to be added to support education and membership. Existing structure had to be adjusted so they could be more focused on their missions and new technology was becoming recognized in informatics that needed to be addressed within the College. So those were the main things that I felt that leadership had to provide to the College as I came on board.

**Julie McDowell:**

Dr. Williams, can we hear from you? What changes did you see during your time on the board and as president?

**Dr. Bruce Williams:**

Sure. I think I can address this, that there were three areas of some change during the time I was president and on the board. One was the involvement of the board in board activities. A lot of times board members tended to be able to sit and not participate very much if they didn't want to. One of the ways that I try to lead meetings in general is I want to make sure everybody's involved and I think you can see it in many things on all the important issues that we had before us, I made sure that every single board member had a say and that they had an opportunity to contribute to the decision that the board finally made.

And even in times when it seemed like there was a fairly straightforward opinion and several people had spoken in favor of it, nobody seemed to be outwardly against it much, I would encourage other people to speak up who had a different opinion. I remember several times I even had to call on some people and they brought up timidly that everything looked pretty good to them except what about this or this or this. And all of a sudden light bulb went on around the table, everybody said, "Oh yeah, we didn't think about that and we need to change how we're going to do this in order to make sure that that doesn't happen." So I think one of the things is that I strove to get the entire board engaged with every discussion that came before the board. And I tried to structure the meeting such that we had important things on the topics.

There was obviously some routine work that we had to take care of, but the board and the president should be leading the strategy of the College and not really concentrating on the operational part. And one of my goals as president was to make sure that the board really did participate in the strategy and try to forward the strategy of the College as a group. One thing that did change during my presidency last part of the board when I was president-elect and president was we hired a new CEO. We had a search committee that was extensive involved all the board to start with. We went through several rounds of reviewing applications and we narrowed the field down to a few people and then there was an interview committee and we went through that ended up choosing Stephen Myers who had been the CFO and COO of the College.

And that really changed a lot of things for me. If we'd brought someone in from outside the College, my first year or two or the whole two years may have been in orienting the new CEO to the College and to try to introduce them to the College activities and the culture of the College. But with Stephen coming on, I didn't have to do that. And I think we actually hit the ground running between Stephen and I in a very collaborative way that enabled the College to actually use the two years of my presidency as a means to forward our agenda and not just marking time and getting the new CEO acquainted with what the College did and was. I have to say that Stephens has been and continues to be a great CEO. I think one of the strengths of the College is the collaborative efforts between the staff and the members. The members have a lot of the knowledge and vision of what happens in pathology, both clinical pathology and anatomic pathology.

And they have expertise that is beyond belief in a lot of fields. And they also have visions on where pathology is going to go and how the College could help folks get there, but we have a day job. We have to come back after our meetings and go to work, and we don't have time to develop these visions that we have about how pathology could be improved and how the College could help. And we rely upon the staff to do that as only the very close collaborative effort between the staff and the members that we can do all the great things that we do in the College. And Stephen really embolizes... I'm sorry, start over. Stephen really is a great example of how staff can collaborate with members, especially his interaction with the board and with the officers, the president-elect, secretary, treasurer, and president.

He's very knowledgeable. He's easy to work with, he has great insight and he's got great instincts on what can and cannot be done. And he shares his beliefs in a very gentle way, not overpowering, but very convincing. And it was very unfortunate I think that we chose Stephen and that change in leadership has had a very positive impact on the College. I think the third area that the leadership has changed is at the committee chairman level and then the committees in general. Of course, the councils are run by the board members, the chair, vice chair or board members. And I was fortunate to have great chairman and vice chairman of all five councils while I was president. They all did an excellent job, but I think some of the real differences came at the chairmanship of the committees level.

One of the things I tried to do was empower the chairman and the committees to do more on their own, to think outside the box and to present new ideas and ways that the College could improve and pass that on up to the council. I also made sure that there was new people on the committee that had not been on any committee in the College before, and that the same was true with some of the chairman that came available for me to appoint. I was trying to make sure that we got new blood in, some younger folks or folks that have been experienced in this area but hadn't really served in the College. And I think the committees during the time that I was president really stepped forward. We have some new committees that I appointed, and between all that, I think that the committee structure was really strengthened and produced a lot of great things. So I think there's three areas that did have some impact on the way College did that changed during the time I was president.

**Julie McDowell:**

Now, Dr. Sodeman, your background is one of being a strong manager in terms of your professional background is one of a strong manager overseeing the consolidation and mergers of hospitals and laboratories. How do you think this background impacted the way you viewed the structure and operations of the CAP and its members?

**Dr. Thomas Sodeman:**

Your question is how does your experience affect your leadership? And I think that's true for all of the leaders of the College, and that's one of the important things about the College is the diversity of leadership brings in a diversity of ideas. I had been involved in two major health systems with the responsibility, as you say, for merging laboratory operations to better take advantage of the economics of personnel savings, I was aware of the importance of structure and operation from that activity. CAP had been stable in its organization on the pathologist side for a long time. The question posed to the strategic planning committee during my two years as president-elect was, was the structure supportive of the operation? Could we improve the structure to better support pathologists and the activities of the College? Could we improve the structure and leadership that the College had?

That was the same question that I approached all the consolidations of the laboratories of the multi health systems that I was in. In the case of the College, could accreditation be separated from scientific affairs to focus the Council on Scientific Affairs on its mission of assuring a high performance level in laboratory operations? Was it not better to have a council on accreditation to focus its efforts on laboratory operations and compliance with the standards? Would that also avoid any potential conflicts between surveys and accreditation? That was really the question that the strategic planning committee was facing as we began to develop the changes that we looked for in the Colleges I came on as president. As the premier organization for pathologist and as a very important educator of pathologist, we needed more leadership in that role so a new council on education with appropriate committees where it's needed to support the operation of education.

When I came on as president-elect and the education efforts were under the board itself as a direct committee, but they needed some independence to be able to operate a really growing program of education. Membership we know is the backbone of the College. So who looks after the membership needs? A new council seemed obvious with committees to focus on pathologists that are just entering practice and supporting those through practice management. Where did you go to learn about practice management, especially if you were the new leader in your group? College really didn't have a place for that activity. The last really growing area at my time was informatic technology.

One of the roles that I assumed in my working life was laboratory information and computers. I didn't know anything about computers. I knew nothing about computers. I played around on an Apple at home and that was it, but all of a sudden chairman at the University of Michigan told me I had the responsibility of computerizing the laboratories. I was focused on microbiology because I was the director of the microbiology laboratory, and computers have never really entered my mind. So I had to learn and understand about computers. There was nowhere to turn in the College, that needed to be corrected. So it felt important to me and the strategic planning committee that an informatics technology leadership committee had to be established. So I think our roles in our own community and our own practices give us experiences that we can carry to and bring to the College.

**Dr. Bruce Williams:**

Tom had a lot of experience with consolidation of mergers and hospitals and laboratories, I did not have that coming to the College, but what I did have was a fairly intense and deep knowledge of medical organizations. I had been on the board of my local city and county, Paris in Louisiana, a society, the Shreveport Medical Society, and had worked my way up to president there, I had become a vice speaker and eventually speaker of the House of Delegates for the State Medical Society and went on to become on the board and president of the State Medical Society. And so when I got into the board and leadership roles in the College, I had some experience on how medical organizations run. I think it was important. Like Tom, I had been on several committees, but I was concentrating predominantly in the laboratory accreditation area. But I think my knowledge of how physicians think and work and what motivates them during the time that I spent in leadership roles and other organizations helped me a lot in bringing that knowledge to the College.

**Julie McDowell:**

So keeping with you, Dr. Sodeman, as I noted in our introduction, you appointed Dr. Williams one of his first leadership roles in the CAP, can you talk a little bit about what you saw in Dr. Williams that made you think he had the potential to be a great leader at the CAP?

**Dr. Thomas Sodeman:**

Sure. Finding leaders for the future and the pathologists are really a heavy responsibility for the president-elect because the president-elect will ultimately appoint leadership within the College and in the committees. So you really have to be involved in the membership and you have to have ways to identify new leaders. Again, new ideas come from new leaders. Static leadership stalls the growth in the development of an organization. I changed a lot. I changed jobs actually every 10 years because I needed the challenges of a new environment. I needed to learn and lead with new ideas in those organizations that I joined. So the College has to turn over its leadership for a new direction and ideas to it. It can't stay static. Well, while I was president-elect and later as president, I visited every committee in the College.

I concentrated more of my activities into attending committees than councils because I knew the councils were under good leadership. They were under the leadership of the board members, and I was going to hear what happened to the council at the board meeting anyway, but I needed to get out there and meet members and as president-elect, it was my responsibility then later to appoint these leaders and members. Dr. Williams stood out. Stood out during that process of going to these committee meetings, as did many other individuals, but clearly Bruce had the leadership skills. He had knowledge, he had a love for the College and he involved himself in CAP activities. Not all members on committees actively involve themselves in the College. They involve themselves in the idea that the committee's dealing with, but not in the College itself. So I chose Wright I think because Bruce grew to become president of the CAP.

**Dr. Bruce Williams:**

I thank Tom for his nice words about how I got involved in leadership roles in the College, I would like to thank him personally for doing that. Without his pointing me to chair of the commission laboratory accreditation, I would never have progressed up through the leadership chain, and I really do appreciate it. I must say I got to know several of the presidents over the years before Tom. Tom Woods was the first one I met. We were coming back from a meeting and we were both going to go to Atlanta and then he was going to go on to Florida. I was coming over to Louisiana, and so we're sitting in the airport waiting on the flight, and he just spoke up and said, |I recognize you from the meeting."

Tom Woods was a great pathologist. He was a great individual, and I think he's the template for the president's coming after him. He was a wonderful individual, but Tom Sodeman was the first president I ever really had worked closely with. I must say that his leadership gave me an inspiration and a template for how to become a leader in the College and how a great leader should be. I really appreciate his taking time to mentor me in the role that he appointed to me in.

**Julie McDowell:**

So speaking a little bit more about leadership, part of the responsibility, as you've stated, Dr. Sodeman as president was in appointing member leaders to councils and committees to give them the opportunity to expand their knowledge and of course grow leadership. I'd like to hear from both of you a little bit more about what was your strategy about going about identifying some of these members who would lead the councils and committees? And again, Dr. Sodeman, if we can hear from you first and then Dr. Williams.

**Dr. Thomas Sodeman:**

Certainly. You have to understand that CAP meetings, committee meetings, and council and board are serious business. Yes, it's a professional organization, but the organization itself conducts a very significant operation that impacts pathology. But it doesn't mean you don't have fun. You always look for the opportunity to have fun, the opportunity to meet with your peers, both in the formal meetings and after hour dinners, make it so it grows. And so you grow as a pathologist and you identify new leaders. Well, I was involved in the College for a long time, in a long time. I served on 46 different committees. I got to know a lot of people serving on those committees.

And I think that's one of the important things for leadership. They need to, especially the leadership on the board and the leadership for the president, they need to have had involvement with the College with committees enough so that they can identify those leaders. Each individual brings to the committee their own interest. And you have to understand what those interests are and what that individual's going to bring. And that's the thing you have to do when you've considered all of these appointments, finding the right match between interest and an individual. Certainly not everybody's interested in management leadership, but some are, but you don't need all leaders and managers. You need people who are involved on the committee and are interested in the ideas of what that committee is doing, too.

So it's a mixture of individuals. As president-elect, that's really a responsibility that you're going to end up with trying to appoint both the leaders as well as members to the committee. So you have to know people. You have to get to know the members. You have to be able to identify those leaders. You have to recognize some yourself. Others are brought to your attention, either in committees or people will come forward to you as president-elect, and they'll bring up individuals that they know of that are showing those leadership capacities. So many times it's information that you receive from others that help you make these decisions. The role again, of that president-elect is to review the direction of the College and to recognize potential members and leaders of the College. And you don't do that without the help of many, many active people that are involved in the committees.

**Julie McDowell:**

Dr. Williams, can we hear from you on this?

**Dr. Bruce Williams:**

Tom is exactly right. The appointment of committee members and chairs of the committees is probably the most important activity that you do. Like Tom, I went to several different committees. I did go to some council meetings also during my president-elect time and on the board time. But I tried to make some committee meetings also, and it was very energizing to see the new members that had recently become members of the committees. And it was exciting to see more experienced people that have been on the committees or different committees for a while and brought a depth of knowledge. The committees are really the core working groups of the College.

Councils are important in aggregating this information and activities to a point where they can be instituted or presented to the board for activities, but it's the committee where all this really starts. And I think that became very aware to me during my time before it became president. So I was very involved and interested in getting the right people in the right place when I was that. My philosophy was, and I know several presidents had different philosophies on how to appoint, but my philosophy was you ought to appoint people with a deep knowledge in the field that they're in. So if there's someone that had a lot of accreditation experience that I think they should have as a board member, be over the accreditation committee or if they were education or knew lot about membership or advocacy, then they should be in those fields in order to bring the best expertise, the most knowledge to the College.

And I found that to be very, very helpful. Having the highest committees, being the councils and the board, being stocked with folks that are well versed in the whole operation of the College, but specifically versed in the areas that they were involved with at the council level, I think led to greater activity and greater success because they spoke and worked from years of experience in the background. And I'd like to thank everybody who was a board member when I was president-elect and president, and who served on councils and committees. I think everyone did a great job.

**Dr. Thomas Sodeman:**

Let me respond real quick to what Bruce just said. I think he's correct. You need to have information about an experience when you're going to move into a position of leadership. Not every president's felt that way though. When I came on to the board, I got appointed as Chairman of the Council on Government Affairs. I had never been involved in any activity related to the Washington office. So I guess it brought some new ideas for me, but it was interesting.

**Julie McDowell:**

Well, thank you both very much for this great discussion. CAP members can download a PDF of a book commemorating the CAP 75th anniversary by Dr. Paul Bachner. Please visit the CAP website and type in 75th anniversary into the search function at the top of the site to get a link to download a book from the CAP's e-store.

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