



# Seeking to Understand:

Working for positive change during the legislative session

BY SHEILA BUSH



When the planning started for this issue of Wyoming Medicine magazine, we thought 2021 would look far different than it has looked thus far. The magazine editorial group discussed needing updates on the most recent legislative session and deep dives on tobacco laws at the state and federal level. We talked through a lot of options, but nowhere in that list was coronavirus and the havoc that it would wreak on our lives.

Each year, at the conclusion of the legislative session, I find myself in a reflective space. Did the Wyoming Medical Society do all we could to advocate on behalf of our members? Did we do justice to the faith that so many place in us to carry their message and educate on complicated issues that so often get unnecessarily politicized? I believe we did. Although not every outcome was ideal, and the approach was different in some ways than in years past, we were able to gain advantages that hold promise for legislative wins in years to come.

The legislative process is physically, mentally, and emotionally draining even in the best of sessions. However, in many ways, this year felt like one of the most contentious. I found myself regularly contemplating how I could personally better influence positive change and how WMS could elevate our organization as a greater contributor to meaningful solutions for our state.

The words and ideas of the author and organizational psychologist Adam Grant continue circling in my mind. Grant's research focuses on motivation, generosity and creativity, with one of his most recent projects delving into the power of knowing what one doesn't know. The fact that he dedicated his latest book title to this concept underscores its importance. We have studied this topic further with FutureSYNC, International leadership faculty, who teach the power of asking oneself "What don't I know?" as one of the seven core leadership principles in the Wyoming Leaders in Medicine Physician Leadership Academy.

Upon reflecting on the legislative session, while trying to

be a good student and steward of these teachings, I found myself asking frequently, "What don't I know?" What did I not understand about the beliefs of some legislators who seemingly came to Cheyenne to unravel Wyoming's public health infrastructure? How could I have listened more empathetically to those who claimed providing access to preventive healthcare for Wyoming's working poor through expanding Medicaid would somehow lead to the state's demise rather than moving Wyoming forward in addressing our growing concerns around healthcare access and cost? How could WMS have communicated better internally about strategically pivoting on key issues in the name of protecting and preserving our finite political resources?

Grant teaches that, "when we try to change a person's mind, our first impulse is to preach about why we're right and prosecute them for being wrong. Yet experiments show that preaching and prosecuting typically backfire—and what doesn't sway people may strengthen their beliefs. Much as a vaccine inoculates the physical immune system against a virus, the act of resistance fortifies the psychological immune system. Refuting a point of view produces antibodies against future attempts at influence, making people more certain of their own opinions and more ready to rebut alternatives."

Students of Grant's writings know that rather than setting out to change minds, they should seek to influence others by helping them find their own intrinsic motivation to change. One should approach these interactions with

motivational interviewing in mind, and listening with great intent. Holding up a mirror so the other person can see their own thoughts more clearly can help to gently persuade them to see an issue through another lens. Seeking first to understand how others see an issue rather than hitting hard with persuasive arguments consistently proves more fruitful in building relationships and developing the trust that's necessary in establishing meaningful influence. However, that's often easier said than done, especially in policy debates

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ADAM GRANT

where the temptations of the preacher and prosecutor methods appeal to our instinct and pride in the moment.

As many of you are aware, we knew that we would be unable to win or influence certain legislative proposals that WMS historically took strong positions against. We instead entered neutral positions on many bills, including a handful that we previously strongly opposed. A benefit of these neutral positions was the creation of a safe space where legislators did not feel threatened, and the WMS was able to gain and strengthen important relationships and set the groundwork for important work in the years to come.

WMS's neutral position on so many legislative issues this year allowed this process of motivational persuasion rather than preacher and prosecutor to unfold. WMS was elevated and able to shine as a resource for legislators. We were able to support individual members in their efforts to advocate personal positions, sometimes even in contradiction with each other.

The longer I have this great privilege of serving WMS, the more I appreciate the valuable role WMS plays in being a

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trustworthy and reliable resource for lawmakers. The brain trust that lives within our membership is impressive and no advocate in our state is more proud of the members they represent.

I'll wrap up this edition of the Director's Column with a heartfelt thank you. A thank you to our members who stick with us not because they agree with every position we take, but because they have faith in WMS, as the leading advocacy voice for physicians and physician assistants in our state, to magnify their voice. Our members place great trust in WMS to message the black and white perspectives of medicine within the gray world of politics. They do so believing that being part of the messy political process is better than standing on the outside looking in, despite knowing that consensus will inevitably escape us on some issues. I firmly believe Wyoming physicians and PAs agree on far more than they disagree, and we can better climb the policy mountains before us when we climb them together.



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