

Those who are sought out by industry to move the ophthalmologic specialty forward have what it takes to attract and engage a following. That factor, says **George O. Waring IV, MD**, is leadership.

THE LEADERSHIP OF OPINION LEADERS



To many, the phrase *opinion leader* describes someone who has a particular area of expertise and is sought out by industry to consult, speak, or write about that topic or technology. It is worthy of note that the term includes the word *leader*, and there is a strong aspect of leadership in the role of the opinion leader.

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LEADERSHIP, IN THIS CONTEXT, may be more about inspiring others than about offering cutting-edge information. Ultimately, it is the ability to empower others that defines leadership. When an individual is empowered, he or she may more effectively move a given situation forward, whether that situation is in one's professional practice or private life.

I imagine the journey of the opinion leader as an individual one; some may seek it, others may be sought out. Tangible activities that may characterize an opinion or thought leader include participating in important research, publishing that research, and speaking about it from the podium. However, intangibles such as risk and chance may also play important roles in the advancement of a particular strain of thought or opinion.

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The restless nature that makes one strive for change may not be enough, however. It is the ability to inspire and empower others to strive for a common goal that defines leadership. The African proverb says it well: "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

Dr. Waring posing during a Xen (Allergan) training day in Panama (left); behind the microscope (right).





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AN EXCELLENT EXAMPLE of the principle of leadership is embodied in mentorship. Every ophthalmologist who helps move the specialty forward has had mentors who have showed him or her the true meaning of leadership by example. These mentors imparted the tools needed to motivate, teach, inspire, and help foster the next generation, just as the previous generation of leaders invested in them. Ultimately, leaders who work well with industry and influence their peers to effect positive change are a resource that continually fuels the growth of ophthalmology. The most fortunate among us have been influenced by true leaders. ■

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Dr. Waring speaking with an industry representative at the 2017 *MillenniaEYE* Live Nashville meeting (above) and at the 2017 AAO meeting (below).