

Transforming Health *through* Passionate Leadership

How one
executive
fuels progress
both here
and abroad

Passion moves people to do great things. Just ask Don Holzworth, senior vice president and director of strategy for SRA International, Inc., and founder and former chairman and CEO of Constella Group, a global professional health services company.

Holzworth has been thinking a lot about passion and how it relates to his success and the success of others. This thinking is not just an exercise for him. It is how he lives his life.

In the early stages of writing a book about leadership for small business owners and embarking on new philanthropic and strategic ventures, this self-described Type A personality is convinced now more than ever that a burning desire to pursue a vision is perhaps one of the most important traits a leader can have.

“For me, the responsibility of a leader is to create a gap between what everyone thinks and does today and what you want them to be thinking or doing tomorrow,” he says. “Passion allows the leader to create that gap,

and people begin to naturally follow the new thinking because the passion and the new thinking are compelling.”

Jesse Milan Jr., senior principal for health policy and promotion at the SRA Constella Group, says, “I’ve seen Don test the waters by exposing his own passion in front of others, and I’ve seen the remarkable response it generated. People truly appreciate leaders who are open and honest about what motivates them.”

Holzworth says he’s always been intense, even during his formative years growing up in Illinois. But it wasn’t until mid-career that he began expressing the motivation behind his drive.

“I’m passionate about what I do because of my father, who was a general practitio-

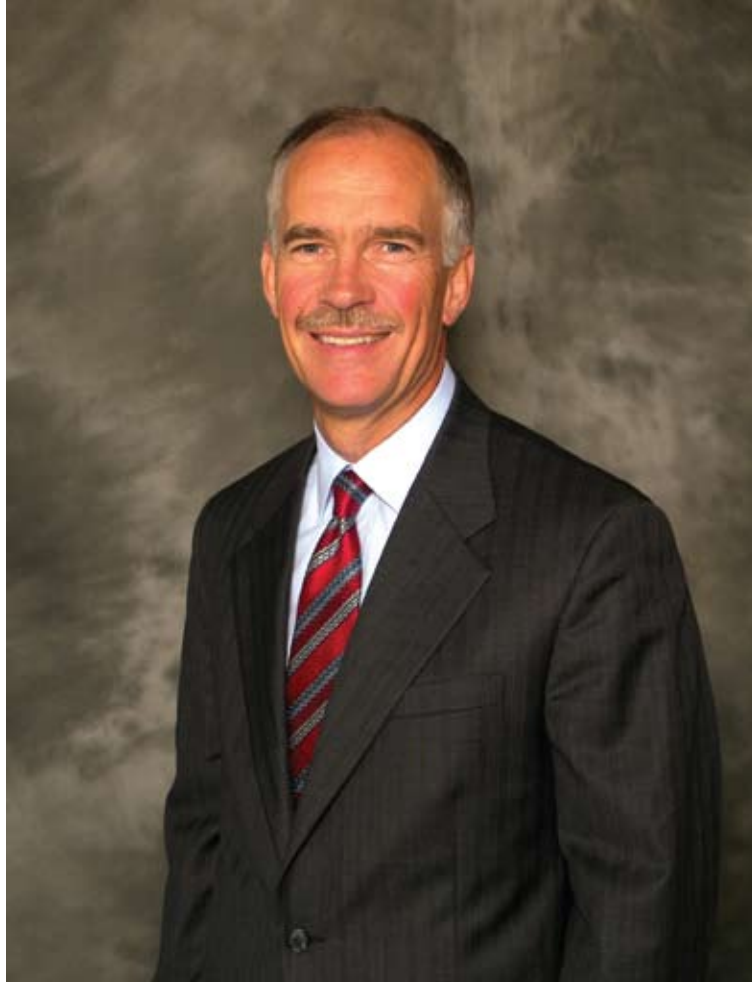
ner,” Holzworth says. “He didn’t make a lot of money, and didn’t seem to mind. He was devoted to healing people. The meaning he brought to my life was enhanced midway through my career. At that point, I saw clearly that I really wanted to do something to improve the health of people around the world.”

When he did open up and share about his father’s work, something interesting and valuable happened to him.

“I’d find people coming up to me sharing their own health-related experiences after I told them about my father,” says Holzworth, who with his wife Jennifer, has two children, Chelsea and David. “Whether it was their own parents involved in medicine or a sister who died of breast cancer, they shared their lives with me. I think it made a real difference. I think it made me more believable as a leader. It also made being a leader more interesting. I felt connected to people.”

That believability, Holzworth says, contributed to the company’s success. Stitching together a number of diverse companies, he quickly built Constella, one of the most profitable and fastest growing health services companies in the United States, garnering

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Don Holzworth

financial and professional rewards along the way, including several Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year™ awards. Constella, now a division of SRA International, Inc., operates in 60 countries and is on the cutting edge of health initiatives being implemented worldwide. His vision—to provide governmental and commercial clients with a wide range of health services—has worked, and Holzworth says his passion made it happen.

It wasn't without a price. Holzworth says some people, including employees, didn't always buy into his vision. He also experienced the pangs of sometimes overwhelming or scaring people with his grand ideas.

"Passion in that case can be a burden," he says. "Sometimes you have to back away, engage with people and have real empathy for where they are. It's all part of being vulnerable—to not be afraid to say that you don't know something or to expose your own weaknesses. I do this, even when it is hard for me to do."

A strategy Holzworth implemented to drive results was to consciously disrupt things when business was good. He would, for example, seek out and make another

was a little bit of tonic, but I did it because I knew that change is hard."

If change is Holzworth's engine for accomplishment, then passion continues to be the high-octane fuel. As a result of the merger with SRA, Holzworth no longer runs day-to-day operations as a chief executive officer.

and nonprofit endeavors, both in the United States and Africa. One of his goals is to continue to help the School of Public Health. As a member of the School's Advisory Council, Holzworth has been instrumental in helping fund the DrPH program in the School's Department of Health Policy and Administration (see pages 6 and 32).

Holzworth and his wife Jennifer also have created endowed scholarships for doctoral students in health policy at the School of Public Health. The scholarships are named in honor of their fathers, Arthur B. Holzworth and Charles A. Zeatch.

"I'm absolutely passionate about what I want to do right now," says Holzworth, "and I'm looking forward to fulfilling that passion. My intention is to continue to make a difference in the lives of people. In that respect, I'm very lucky to be able to do different things." ■

— BY GENE PINDER

The responsibility of a leader is to create a gap between what everyone thinks and does today and what you want them to be thinking or doing tomorrow.

acquisition or even bring in a new executive with a different way of thinking.

"At the beginning of every year, I told my employees that our business was not going to be the same a year later," he says. "I felt it was better to communicate that than not. It

Instead, the senior vice president now pursues more strategic opportunities for SRA and Constella, such as finding new markets, leveraging current customers and finding gaps in the markets to fill. He's also focusing on helping more people through philanthropic