

# A MOVING “FORWARD”

GARY ADAMSON

What is possible here? That question has been with humankind since the beginning. And whether the subject is new methods of hunting and gathering or new ways of connecting the six billion people that inhabit the planet, all progress starts with that single question: What is possible here?

Possibility is an exciting thing to ponder. But it is also fraught with many obstacles and doubts: “We couldn’t possibly *do* that,” or worse, “We couldn’t possibly *be* that.” Most often, the practitioners of the currently esteemed “best practice” in any field are the ones who stand most firmly against “radical” change. That is a fact filled with irony, since all best practices of today were radical approaches just yesterday.

In the 1900s, conventional wisdom held that man couldn’t fly. In the 1910s, conventional wisdom thought that mass-producing reliable, non-horse-drawn transportation was impossible. In the ’50s, it was believed that man could not climb Mount Everest or run a mile in under four minutes. (Sir Edmund Hillary and Roger Bannister proved conventional wisdom wrong on both counts within six months of each other.) In the ’60s, it was widely held that America was hopelessly behind the Russians in the space race. Looking back, much of what passed for irrefutable conventional wisdom seems silly today. And yet, we are just as limited by our own conventional wisdom as the leaders in the technology field during the ’70s, who boldly predicted the need for as many as six computers in the world.

If you doubt this is so, let’s engage in a simple thought experiment. I want you to think about a typical 50-bed hospital. That shouldn’t be too hard to do since there are many of them in this country. Now that you have that image in your mind, let me ask you some questions about it. What does it look like? What kind of technology does it have? From



how far away do patients come? How successful is it in recruiting highly respected physicians from throughout the country? And most importantly, has it made many nationally recognized innovations in healthcare?

Conventional wisdom holds that a 50-bed hospital can't do most of these things at all, much less do them exceptionally. And yet, you are holding in your hands the story of a 49-bed hospital that was the second place in the United States, after Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, to implement intensity-modulated radiation therapy (IMRT) technology; has drawn patients from 28 states; has recruited heads of departments from leading academic medical centers to practice there; and has hosted more than 2,000 site visits for people coming from all over the world to study its innovations. This is the impossible story of Mid-Columbia Medical Center (MCMC), a 49-bed hospital located in The Dalles, Oregon. Impossible except for one thing: The people at MCMC didn't think it was impossible, and they were right.

Jim Goodwin put it this way: "The impossible is often just the untried." The Chinese have a saying that goes: "Those who are busy talking about how something is impossible should not interrupt those who are busy doing it." In both cases, confident, persistent action, based on passionately held beliefs, is what separates people who make discoveries from those who get news about them. In the case of MCMC, it started with the co-author of this book, Leland Kaiser, Ph.D., and the architect of MCMC's transformation, Mark Scott. Both of them have had a great affect on me — Lee, as the head of my graduate school program in health administration and Mark as my business partner in Starizon.

One of the great privileges of my life is having each of them as a colleague, a mentor and a friend. Knowing them the way I do, I am certain that this book was not written to brag and boast about the exploits of MCMC, although I am sure they are both proud of what is happening there. No, they wrote this book as a personal challenge to you — a challenge to defy the gravitational pull of conventional wisdom that keeps you stuck in doing the old way harder; a challenge to believe in your thoughts and your ideals; and a challenge to act now, and act forcefully, because the future of your company and your industry depends on it.

MCMC's story is not a fairy tale that happened in a far-off land that you cannot visit. Instead, it is meant as an inspiring story of possibility that concludes with this thought, "If they can do it, why can't we?"