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Editorial

Development of Leadership Competencies among Food and Nutrition Scientists: A Road to *Greatness*

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Leadership, as a shared influence process (1), is nowadays one of the most talked about issues in management and business schools and literature. There is convincing evidence that leadership development can significantly improve performance at both individual and organizational levels (1, 2). Performance in the sectors with nonprofit nature (e.g., care, science, education and art) also positively responds to higher levels of leadership competencies in human resources.

Besides *effectiveness* and *efficiency*, as the two outcomes directly related to the enhancement of leadership competencies, *greatness* should be set as the ultimate goal for such an empowerment endeavor (3); this is especially true for professionals working for science, the territory characterized by its nonprofit, mindfulness and futuristic dimensions. Scientists working in this new paradigm will exemplify "transformation from successful faculty member... to effective academic leader", as described by Gmelsh and Buller (4).

Seeliger, in her note published in *Nature* (5), rightly pointed to the necessity of management trainings for scientists. Very recently, Kvaskoff and McKay (6) expanded the discussion to the field of leadership, to cover the strategic and emotional directions and behaviors of scientists. The authors then concluded that despite the reality and need, the number of leadership training events for scientists were far less than adequate around the globe, even in the US. Other scholars have also acknowledged this fact (4).

Having the above notions in mind, this editorial is going to raise another important observation made by the authors in the last 6 years. We have been developing leadership training programs - focusing on the individual, interpersonal and organizational aspects of leadership - for food and nutrition professionals in Iran and the Middle-east region since 2009. In general, all our training events at local, national and regional levels have shown high degrees of satisfaction, as the first level of evaluation (7). As expected, the majority of participants in our workshops were young female students or graduates in food and nutrition disciplines. In the meantime, we noted that *inspiration* and *satisfaction*, the two immediate qualities expressed by the participants, tended to show a reverse association with the participation age; the younger the participant, the higher the inspiration (s)he expressed. While, this observation should not bring up a biased conclusion to limit leadership trainings to younger professionals, it may re-emphasize the fact that behavioral changes are much better rooted in the *earlier life* and *career*. Leadership trainings for scientists late in their careers may not have the same desired impact in terms of integrating leadership competencies into professional mindset and behavior. Given our experience in Iran, we suggest that more effective training outcomes can be achieved in young graduates with few years of professional experience. With regard to the science domain, this approach may be an investment, and even jump start, for improving both the *effectiveness* and *greatness* of scientists in the country, especially if we simultaneously target longer *learning*, *behavior* and *results* outcomes (7) in programs. With no doubt, thousands of hours of practice, reflection and feedback shall complement short-term trainings if the above goal is going to be met (4).

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In short, leadership development has already been advised for practitioners in nutrition, such as public health professionals (8, 9). It is highly advisable to invest on the leadership competencies of *promising* scientists at earlier development and career stages. It is recommended that 'intra- and inter-personal development programs' be integrated into degree curricular programs as early as possible, along with the cognitive and psychomotor development of students. Workplace practice and experience, refreshing courses, and mentoring and coaching by scholars (1, 8) are other strategies to keep the momentum of leadership transformation. By incorporating these suggestions, the ultimate goal of leadership development - to inspire people to take responsibility for improving self and others - will not be limited to just *effectiveness* and *efficiency* concepts; the *greatness* in food and nutrition scientists, who are supposed to be the inter-connected pioneers in science, role models, and change makers in the society, shapes the horizon.

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