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# HEALTH POOL ★ NEWS

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*Meet Blake Petrash, Mayor Pro Tem of Ganado, Texas, and Chair of the TML Health Board of Directors. Blake was selected by the Nominations Committee to fulfill an unexpired term on the Board in September of 2016. He was elected by members of Region 11 in 2017, and became Vice-Chair in 2018. In June 2020, Blake became Chair of the Board. We sat down with Blake to discuss all things leadership, from the principles that got him through the pandemic to advice he has for up-and-coming future leaders.*

**You entered the position of Chair right at the beginning of the pandemic. Has this past year changed you and your approach to leadership?**

**Blake Petrash:** I think if anything, navigating through the last year has really highlighted some key leadership principles for me that I've doubled down on. Most important of which is successful communication.

I know working from home has people pretty split. Some people like it, some people don't. But me, I'm a big people person. I need that personal connection with those I'm talking to. When you're in a room together, there's a sense of collaboration that just can't happen when only one person can talk at a time over Zoom. I think the board at TML Health is so effective because it has a sense of collaboration among the staff, the administration, and the board.

Which highlights another aspect of communication that's important: it has to go both ways. Successful leadership doesn't just come from being able to easily express your own ideas, you need to be a good listener too. I really have to say kudos to the staff at TML Health. They were so open and flexible with the transition. And then IT was quick to communicate with everyone through the technological hurdles of working remote. But every aspect of that move worked because communication was a two-way street.

The staff worked with us because they understood the decision and they felt heard. As unforeseeable struggles arose from the transition, the board was listening and ready to provide solutions.

**Was there anyone in your life whom you base your leadership off of? Someone who taught you a thing or two about leadership?**

**BP:** Well, I'd hate to give him a bigger head than he's already got (*laughs*) but my uncle's a retired colonel who's literally sent men into battle. If there's one thing he really instilled in me, it was the importance of empathy, and the idea of being a "Servant Leader."

That boils down to understanding and working for your team. Being "Chair" may sound like everyone works for you, but really it's the other way around: I work for everyone. It's my job to understand the hardships of our staff. Once I comprehend their struggles, I remove any blockers so the staff can better serve the people of Texas.

**We have time for just one more question: if you could leave up-and-coming leaders with one bit of advice, what would it be?**

**BP:** Respect the wisdom of those who came before you. I think a lot of young leaders today (and I know because I was the same way) are too quick to dismiss those who came before them. Up-and-comers want to reinvent the wheel and make big changes with radical new ideas, but those older than you have experienced a lifetime of wins and losses that gave them invaluable knowledge. Learn as much from them as you can. Then change the world.

**Thank you so much for your time Blake.**

**BP:** Of course! I just hope somewhere in there was something useful (*laughs*). ★