

---

# Rules of Engagement

Some Expectations for  
SOMC Leaders

---

**The Executive Leadership Team**

June 2003

We are passionately engaged in building a great health care organization—one that will serve this community with distinction long after we are gone.

That commitment is founded on our mission to make a difference in the lives of those we serve. We will make that difference by creating and sustaining an organization that ensures exceptional safety, offers exceptional quality, provides exceptional service, nourishes exceptional relationships and, as a direct consequence, produces exceptional financial performance.

Over the past decade, SOMC leaders engaged in the pursuit of excellence have discovered ways to work together more effectively. We have come to refer to these guidelines for more effective teamwork as, “Rules of Engagement.” These guidelines are not the final words on the ways committed leaders might work together to make a difference, but they will endure as foundations for our high-performing leadership teams. They are partial explanations for our success, and a concise behavioral orientation for leaders who are considering careers here.

## **We work hard on things that matter.**

Leaders engaged in building great organizations work hard, but they don’t work as hard as their counterparts struggling to sustain mediocre institutions. We recognize that exhaustion is the result of our failure to recognize our limits. We figure out what is most important and apply ourselves with vigor.

## **We select the right leaders for the right jobs.**

Extruding well-intentioned leaders who are not getting the job done is hard for us, but we understand that nothing discourages good people more quickly than ineffective leaders. We do not expect perfection but, considering our individual strengths and weaknesses, we do expect each leader to add net value to the organization. We intend to place leaders in positions where they can succeed.

## **We concentrate on asking the right questions.**

Like most leaders, we enjoy making decisions and appearing decisive. The inclination to make precipitous decisions is strong. We resist that tendency by forcing ourselves to ask the right questions before jumping to conclusions. We manage by fact instead of impulse by asking for the data to make a compelling case.

## **We avoid secrecy.**

People love secrecy. It is a way to avoid being held accountable or forced to make a compelling case. We understand that secrecy undermines our credibility and inclines people to question our integrity. For these reasons, we make information widely available, and we involve as many people as possible when making important decisions.

## **We embrace discomfort.**

Discomfort is the foundation of all meaningful learning. People who are comfortable feel no need to change or grow or stretch themselves. Recognizing that excessive comfort induces sedation and that excessive discomfort incites retreat, we seek to sustain that level of mild discomfort that is motivating.

## **We talk to each other, not about each other.**

We get aggravated with each other from time to time. When this happens, we recognize our natural inclination to talk behind each other’s backs—and we resist that inclination by reminding each other about how we would want to be treated in the same circumstance.

## **We grow thick skins.**

We do not enjoy being criticized. We want everybody to love us, agree with us and support us. When they don’t, we sometimes feel hurt, rejected and discouraged. We then permit these painful feelings to decrease our effectiveness as leaders. We recognize our need to stop being so sensitive.

## **We hold each other accountable.**

We are sincere people intent on “walking the talk” but, being human, we make mistakes. When we do, we depend on each other to call these slips to our attention. When confronted, we are embarrassed, but we contain our defensiveness, thank our colleagues for bringing this to our attention and then strive to do better in the future.

## **We make our expectations clear.**

We understand that people cannot read our minds. We realize that we usually have not communicated as effectively as we think we have. When colleagues are not performing adequately, we respond by assuming that we have not communicated effectively and by making our expectations clear. We document our expectations often.

## **We set high expectations for ourselves and others.**

A few years ago, nobody expected much from SOMC, and we didn't expect too much of ourselves beyond making some money and staying out of trouble. Things have changed. We have achieved some excellence, tasted some greatness and it we like it. We now know that we can build a great organization here, and we intend to do it. And we know how we will do it. We will do it by selecting and developing great people, setting high expectations and holding ourselves accountable for achieving things many of the people in our community didn't believe possible—and still don't!

## **We listen more than we talk.**

We are passionate people with strong opinions. We realize that we must resist the temptation to dominate discussions, or to smother healthy debate because it makes us uncomfortable.

## **We deal with conflict directly and resolve it promptly.**

Conflict happens. It is unpleasant. And everybody wants to avoid it at all costs. We realize that avoiding conflict is a serious leadership failure, and so we bolster our resolve and deal with it promptly, dispassionately and courteously. As we mature as leaders, we come to view conflict as a vital catalyst for innovation and growth.

## **We examine our options, deliberately choose the best one and then act without undue delay.**

In every dilemma, there are always options. And there is always a best option. Recognizing this, we allow a reasonable time to examine our available options and to select the best one. We then move quickly to communicate the plan, execute the plan and to measure its effectiveness.

## **We face reality.**

People in the trenches know the truth, and leaders who insist on pretending and spinning cannot be trusted. Even when it makes us very uncomfortable, we face the brutal truth because we realize that this is the only way to convince others that we are for real and that we are committed to making a difference.

## **We take full responsibility for our own feelings and behaviors.**

When leaders get mad, we usually point to someone or something else as the cause for our outrage. This defensive technique permits us to feel fully justified in indulging in a temper tantrum. We know better. While unwilling to excuse the rude, hateful or malicious actions of others, we acknowledge that how we react is our responsibility. In particular, when our colleagues are expressing their positions good-humoredly and we become upset, we understand that it is our problem, not theirs.

## **We deliver on our commitments.**

The best strategies are worse than worthless if they are not executed successfully. And successful organizational execution always comes down to the involved leaders delivering on their commitments. Knowing this, we do not make commitments lightly. When we commit, we deliver.

## **We recognize that emotional arousal is a danger sign.**

Leaders only become upset when they feel threatened for some reason. And leaders who are intentionally engaged in identifying the best idea instead of getting their own way don't feel threatened by challenges, clarifying questions or opposing points of view. When we become upset, it usually means something is amiss and that further exploration is needed. For this reason, when we become upset, we stop and give ourselves time to cool off, reflect and reconsider.

## **We build lasting relationships by engaging in real work as a team.**

Group social activities have their place, but real teamwork occurs only we confront a demanding challenge that requires a team approach to achieve the desired result. We look for opportunities to work together as a team. For example, we travel and learn in groups, and we work on meaningful organizational projects during business meals while we are away.

## **We cut each other some slack—but not too much.**

None of us is at his or her best every day. We sometimes become tired, distracted, irritable and aggravating. We sometimes behave badly. So long as a destructive pattern does not emerge, we overlook each other's occasional shortcomings, knowing that our colleagues will have an opportunity to return the favor. But we do not ignore a persistent pattern of poor behavior.

## **We have fun.**

This is more than a job for us. We genuinely like and respect the people we work with, and we believe in what we are doing. We are privileged to do work that is meaningful—some would say sacred. We are as professional and committed and caring as they come. But “offstage,” when it is appropriate, we have a great deal of fun. We laugh, rejoice and celebrate for we are blessed.

We encourage those aspiring leaders who fully embrace these principles and are eager to commit themselves to the passionate pursuit of excellence to join us in our quest. Those who find these guidelines too demanding or constraining will not be comfortable here. They should pursue leadership careers somewhere else.