

# DONALD DEIESO, PH.D.

## Dedicated to a Higher Purpose

**D**onald Deieso, Ph.D., has devoted his life to public health. Dr. Deieso lives a purposeful life by contributing to mankind and being a champion for patients. He is not interested in following the path of least resistance, his goal is to transform the clinical trial industry. As executive chairman and CEO of WIRB-Copernicus Group (WCG), he sets an example for colleagues by displaying strength of character in everything he does; his word is his bond.

Over his career, he has led eight companies, but building the WCG enterprise of companies has been the most gratifying. Since founding the company in 2012, WCG has grown more than 15 times in size. And for those at WCG, under Dr. Deieso's leadership this simply means helping many more patients enjoy better cures and interventions. He embodies a joy of purpose that extends throughout the organization; he communicates WCG's powerful mission is about saving lives and his hope is that through this purpose, joy becomes permanent in his employees' lives.



**PV: How do you inspire others to reach their personal and professional goals?**

**DEIESO:** A leader is only as good as the last promise kept. So for me, when there is trust in what you say, there will be belief in what you do. So that, for me, is the first element of a leadership style. You can paraphrase it and say "walk the talk," and I understand those phrases, but for me it's really based in trust.

I learned the most important traits that I needed to know about leadership by watching my grandfather return from work as a construction laborer each day. He had calloused hands and he was in complete exhaustion, but he had no complaints and he always had a smile for me as a little

boy. He taught me that commitment is making a promise to something without the expectation of a reward, in his case his commitment was to family. And every leader must understand the power of commitment at a deep level.

We learn leadership through example. In this, my dad was my most influential mentor. He provided an uncompromising set of values. He taught me "Don, your word is your bond," and on that I've never veered one bit. He pushed me to work as hard as he did so that I could realize my full potential. Because he believed I could do it, I believed I could do it. For leaders, you have to trust your team greatly and they will show themselves great. And so I say this to every emerging leader I can coach: Just trust your team, treat them with greatness, and watch what they do. It's remarkable.

As a CEO leader, perhaps the greatest trait though — and this one is the greatest challenge — is you have to appear like the biblical Moses. Your team must believe you're going to take them to the promised land with a simple clearly articulated path for success. So those are the ingredients I've always followed and this is my eighth company as CEO and I'm sticking to it.

**PV: What two words would you use to describe yourself as a leader?**

**DEIESO:** The two words are passionate and committed. People think passion is something that manifests itself in high emotional outbursts — ranting or shouting or some dramatic display; of course, it's not that at all. Passion is the interest in your life — the single thing in your life that you care about; the thing that keeps you up at night that you invest yourself in with your heart, your body and your soul. It comes with the recognition that you are living for others, not just for yourself. And so it's a fire within the soul. I'm a musician and so I tend to think about things in that level of passion. Our deeper selves want to invest our time in work, in something that summons the greatness

### Donald Deieso, Ph.D.

**TITLE:** Executive Chairman and CEO

**COMPANY:** WIRB-Copernicus Group

**INDUSTRY AWARDS:** PharmaVOICE 100, 2019 and 2016

**COMPANY AWARDS:** 20 Innovators Changing the Face of the Clinical Trials Industry, CenterWatch, 2013; EY Entrepreneur of the Year, finalist in New Jersey, 2010

that we have inside of us. And so passion is that key for me. Without passion, I'd have no reason for being.

The second is commitment. It's simply making a promise to something without an expectation of a reward. It goes along with good character. You surrender to a cause you believe in. It turns out that we all have an intrinsic need to pursue purposes larger than ourselves. Not all purposes are equal. Existing for the sole pursuit of desire soon feels empty.

When you have the material possessions that you desired — you have your car, you have a house, and you have all of those things — then what? I was most impressed with a new book and I can't recommend it enough, David Brooks' *The Second Mountain*. And in it, he describes just that phenomenon that we're all brought up to have the house and car and these possessions and he said "and then in some stage of life you begin to ask what now?" And so this commitment is very simple — the second mountain of maturity. Not all people have it. Some people get stuck on the first mountain, some go into the valley of despair, they may have had tragedy in their lives, and they get stuck there. But when you rise to the second mountain it's because you begin to recognize that self-centered is not the purpose; it's being other-centered, thinking of others.

**PV: How do you foster a culture of innovation throughout the organization?**

**DEIESO:** In 2012, when we started the WCG enterprise, we set out to transform the clinical trial process and we set out to help transform the industry. It was a simple organizing principle and purpose and we've not strayed from it one bit; that was our reason for being. As the French would say *raison d'être*, and that's what we did. Collectively, the management team shared the same genetic

# 2020 Pharma**VOICE** AWARDS

# Congratulations to Our Honorees!



## **Don Deieso, PhD**

Chairman & CEO, WCG

Don is once again recognized by PharmaVOICE, this time as a 2020 Red Jacket honoree! Don balances the relentless pursuit of innovation with an unwavering commitment to doing what's right for patients, and in doing so, brings his colleagues and the clinical research community together to make a difference.



## **Dawn Flitcraft**

President, Ethical Review Division

Hats off to Dawn, President of WCG's Ethical Review Division, for being named to this year's PharmaVOICE 100 most inspiring leaders in the global life sciences industry! Dawn is known for her passion, vision and judgement, and her innate ability to motivate teams to see challenges as opportunities to drive innovation and impact.

*Extraordinary times require extraordinary leadership, and we're incredibly fortunate and proud to have Don Deieso and Dawn Flitcraft at WCG's helm. On behalf of the entire WCG team and the patients and industry we serve, thank you both for your unparalleled leadership and unwavering commitment to advancing clinical research!*



wcgclinical.com

code that considered maintaining the status quo was failure. So every day, we get up, and know if something's been done the same way for 10 years, we're against it.

One of the most I'd say concerning things for me as industry is that on one side the scientists are pushing the frontiers of biology down to a sub-cellular level; we're down to strands of DNA, the genius of it is remarkable. I'm trained as a scientist and I sit in homage every day to what these beautiful minds are achieving. And then we look at the other side of running a clinical trial for example and it's the same old thing day after day. But for WCG, we set out at the beginning to change the status quo. We tell our people if you aren't comfortable every day to change two or three things in our company and help the industry, we are the wrong company for you.

People who say no to change, hold on because they're afraid to take a risk. There's an old saying that I buy: When you're organized in non-profit or in large companies, you're organized not to fail. But those of us in companies like WCG and others and many like it, are organized to succeed. Those are two different motives. I wish that innovation in the pharmaceutical industry adopted that notion: It is time to be organized and managed to succeed. Let's not worry about failure, let's worry about success.

Innovation is not in short supply in our industry. We have innovation in the industry, what we lack is courage. And so it's time — leadership at the top must start to have courage.

**PV: How are you raising the bar?**

**DEIESO:** Whether it's COVID, post-COVID, new normal — whatever the phrase, the one thing that will remain constant is the need for leadership. And so I chose as raising the bar, just a simple phrase, through leadership. It's about moving others to achieve things that they did not believe they could achieve by giving them the confidence to do uncommon things.

When you think about everything we've done as an industry, as individual companies, setting that bar for uncommon things, setting goals so high but giving it purpose for me is as simple as that. I don't think any of us in this industry haven't looked with pride at the way R&D teams and scientists are collaborating and sharing information openly because they know the fate of the human population is at play. It was an insight into a nirvana time.



PASSIONATE. COMMITTED.

***Raising the bar... through leadership***

**PV: What advice do you provide to future leaders?**

**DEIESO:** There's an old mentor of mine who said to me as he began to think about retirement, "When you have less in front of you than you have behind you, your life priorities suddenly become clear." And so for me, I can tell you mentoring is all that I do and all that I enjoy. It's my way of giving back. There's an old phrase, "Live like this may be your last day because one day it will be." And so for me, giving back, giving it forward, paying it forward to management teams is what dominates my day. It isn't an easy thing to mentor in today's world but for me it's all there is. We are known by what we leave behind.

I tell folks that being able to articulate an idea is not the same as putting it into action. Much of leadership is helping people deal with change, understanding the human elements of making change.

Of course, the change you want starts with you. And so I say to them "Change begins in the mirror; to lead others, you have to lead yourself." In short, never miss a moment in your career to implement change when you are presented with a leadership moment. Just think about change every day. I personally get up every morning, I write on a piece of paper the three things I'm going to change that day. And if life interferes with that, one urgency or another, I'm not the same at the end of that day.

I've got to go back and I've got to get that done. So inculcating that value of change is probably the single most important thing I would bequeath to leaders today: Don't miss a leadership moment; they come too infrequently.

**PV: What would you like your legacy to be?**

**DEIESO:** I'm hopeful that in the future when history comes to account that WCG will be regarded well as an organization of dedicated professionals who made a significant contribution by having the courage to be an advocate for change. Perhaps the most lasting legacy will be the contrast we provided to those who regarded change as fearful, unwanted risk, and impossible to achieve.

Whenever I think of the word impossible, one of my favorite quotes was a Muhammad Ali quote, in which in a most articulate way he said and I quote: Impossible is just a big word thrown around by small men who find it easier to live in the world they've been given than to explore the power they have to change it. Impossible is not a fact. It's an opinion. Impossible is not a declaration. It's a dare. Impossible is potential. Impossible is temporary.

When I talk to folks about WCG's future, it's very simple — it's change; take what others have said is impossible, show them it's possible, and be remembered for that.

It may not be a Harvard Business Review article but it will certainly be something that will benefit mankind. **PV**

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