

**Nominee: Charles J Rothwell, Director - Division of Vital Statistics, CDC / National Center for Health Statistics**

**Why is this person a great federal leader?**

In my mind, this man epitomizes everything a top shelf leader should be, which makes him exceedingly rare in federal service, or even private industry. First of all, he has vision, a long-term view of where he wants his organization to go. That vision is both clear and specific, not a cluster of ambiguous generalities. Secondly, he has a very good sense of how to operationalize that. In other words, he has thought through a basic roadmap of how to get there and knows that it is feasible. Third, he truly welcomes the input of his staff. This is possibly the most rare characteristic of all. This man does not pay mere lip service to teamwork, to encouraging staff participation. He is neither a demagogue nor a sycophant nor a petty dictator ruling by thinly disguised fiat. He really encourages all staff to give ideas and suggestions and is very openminded and inclusive. But at the same time, he is a strong person and when it's time to make a decision, he does. He does not shirk from making difficult decisions, as so many do.

Another characteristic which makes him an effective leader is his strong support of his staff. People want to work for him and seek to get into his division. He is generous with giving credit where it is due, and does not claim the limelight for himself. He shares well. He also has the unusual capacity to recognize people's strengths and weaknesses, and puts them in positions with responsibilities which play to their strengths. He really tries to help his staff shine. This is definitely not a work environment where everyone has to sink or swim on their own.

An additional talent this leader possesses is the ability to inspire not only those within his organization, but also those outside the organization. In our area of oversight, we have to work with all the state and local leaders, who are often as not a contentious and divisive group, with sometimes quite divergent viewpoints. This man has a gift for communicating effectively with all these folk and anticipating their concerns. Thus, he is always prepared to respond to them in ways they can appreciate and take back to their own leaders. Since he is clear and specific, they know where he stands, and they can get excited about where he wants all of us to go. There is a concrete set of goals. Similarly, they also know he welcomes their input as well, and is quite sincere about needing their accord and joint participation. Amazing.

Finally, this leader works very hard. He is good with delegating responsibilities, but at the same time he sets a good example for the staff. He is not afraid to roll up his shirtsleeves and pitch in when it is needed, regardless of whether it is in his "job description." He puts in long hours, and conveys to the staff how important he feels his work to be — that it is not mere paper-pushing, but of real value to the American public. I'd say he epitomizes "public servant."

**Give at least one specific example of a time this person has shown their exceptional leadership abilities.**

This man was the first person to win the management award from the local union within our center. This is indicative of how much his rank and file employees appreciate his management style. He has been

able to take on employees discarded by other parts of our agency and turn them around into success stories countless times.

In another example, regarding improving and expediting the collection of vital statistics data throughout the U.S., a critical need for health and medical research, this man was able to bring together representatives from all the 50 states and various jurisdictions, plus the necessary federal staff, to reach agreement on common goals and the efforts each had to implement in order to achieve those goals. This is a nearly impossible achievement, metaphorically akin to cajoling and inspiring 54 independent fiefdoms, plus the overarching government infrastructure. Consider that each of these groups has its own budget and resource constraints, differing objectives, their own legislatures to report to, varying levels of local government oversight, not to mention personal opinions and differing levels of management skills. As a result, we have concrete goals to aim towards, and have been making steady progress towards those goals. Plus, he continues to interact with all parties concerned to change or modify goals as circumstances warrant. He is not an ideologue who is inflexible to change. This man also has the rare ability to know when to leave well enough alone.

In federal government especially, every new manager feels they need to "leave their mark" on every project or organizational structure within their domain. As a consequence, many groups which were functioning quite effectively got restructured "just because" and ceased to be as effective. When this man became division director in 2003, he assessed his new organization and genuinely evaluated what really needed improving or changing, and left untouched those parts which were efficient and productive, except to continue to provide the support and encouragement which made them thrive. As a result, his division has made great strides towards speeding up the processing and production of vital statistics data, has increased their research publications and has grown considerably in the number of customers serviced by their database matching service.

All who work here would say that the Division of Vital Statistics is a well-oiled machine with clearly defined goals and expectations, run by a highly adept leader and manager. In earlier areas of state government service, this man was the first to institute a state center for health statistics in his state, implement maternal and child health monitoring for his state, and spearhead some of the first ever infant birth and death data matching projects in order to evaluate and reduce the number of infant deaths in his state.

### **What qualities do you look for in a great leader?**

The critical and indispensable quality is that a leader has to have vision and has to be able to inspire people to see, and want to implement that vision. The vision must take into account the big picture and must have concrete, achievable goals.

Leaders communicate effectively and clearly and are very decisive people. Yet they are also inclusive people and work well with those both within and without their organization.

A leader must be someone ethical and trustworthy, whom you know you can depend on no matter what. Leaders should never be petty or vindictive. Also, you must be able to rely upon this person's statements, and that you know they will follow through on their promises.

A leader should know how to make the most of the talents his/her staff possess and guide them to their own successes. A leader has to recognize that they are where they are because of all the people who work for them. Leaders must be willing to give credit where it is due and make employees feel appreciated. A leader also has to have the expertise and experience necessary to do their job, so that their staffs have faith their leader knows what s/he is doing. Too many times in federal government, the appointed leaders are there for reasons other than their expertise in that subject area, nor for their management skills.