

Part 2 – Equipping with a Cure

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu equipped an empire with a defense against the scourge of smallpox. Her story yields powerful insights for leaders desiring to learn how to equip their organizations for success.

#1 Be a Student of Success

Likely, several English visitors to Turkey had noted the peculiar absence of smallpox in the country. However, Lady Montagu took initiative to investigate the anomaly until she understood its cause. In doing so, she discovered the medical practices by which the Turks protected themselves from smallpox.

Leaders in the 21st century have no shortage of information at their disposal. Seemingly we swim in a sea of data. What separates equippers is their ability to focus on meaningful information and to extract wisdom from it. Having done so, they are positioned to share their insights with others.

Lady Montagu's example instructs us on where to look for important data: wherever you find positive deviation from the norm. In short, pay attention to success. When you come across an unusually gifted person or a particularly profitable organization, explore what makes them great. The lessons you learn can be applied personally and passed on to those you lead.

#2 Inject Wisdom with Passion

What separates those who are indifferent from those who are willing to make a difference? Passion. Lady Montagu felt compelled to equip her countrymen with a deterrent to smallpox. Her knowledge of inoculation would have been useless had she not been impassioned to share it with physicians across England.

Where does passion come from? Often it can be traced to the hardships we endure in life. Lady Montagu had nearly been killed by smallpox, and her face was forever marred by the scars it left behind. She knew firsthand of the agonizing effects of the disease, and her brother had died from the sickness. Her personal experiences with smallpox burdened her to do everything possible to halt its spread.

#3 Make Personal Sacrifices

To equip another person, you have to give something up yourself. Lady Montagu gave of her time and wealth to educate the British public about inoculation. She even sacrificed security, hazarding the health of her daughter to convince royal surgeons of the value of immunization. If you hope to equip others to change their behaviors, then prepare to part with comfort, security, or popularity.

#4 Seek the Support of Top Decision-Makers

When Lady Montagu returned to England from the Ottoman Empire, she took her cause straight to the top, announcing the benefits of inoculation to the royal court. She understood the imperative of winning over the men and women who held the most sway over the public. That's why she invited the king's personal physician to witness the inoculation of her daughter.

Before you can equip an organization with a new strategy, you must garner the endorsement of the uppermost decision-makers. While everyone has a degree of influence, some allies are far more advantageous than others. Take notice of power structures where you work and prioritize winning the support of authority figures before attempting to introduce change.

#5 Be Willing to Start Small

If you see what needs to be done to equip your company for the future, but you aren't the one in charge, then be willing to start small. Course adjustments demand a sizeable commitment of organizational energy. Most leaders are reluctant to redeploy substantial resources until they're convinced a solution works. Test-piloting a new initiative allows you to demonstrate the strength of your strategy without asking your higher-ups to put the business at risk.

Royal physicians in England did not give Lady Montagu their unqualified support until they had tested inoculation on a handful of prisoners. For Lady Montagu, who was firmly convinced of the need to inoculate Britons, the experiment may have seemed like a pointless delay. Yet although it took time, it gained her the official sanction needed to educate the public about immunization.

#6 Leverage the Influence of Key Leaders

Once you've won over leaders at the top, leverage their influence in your efforts to equip others. Lady Montagu borrowed influence from the nobility supporting her in order to communicate effectively to an entire empire. For example, after she secured the backing of the Princess of Wales, Lady Montagu made the most of the princess' platform and popularity to spread the word about smallpox inoculation.



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