**DEFICIT FOCUS VS. SYSTEMS FOCUS**

*The single biggest failure of leadership is to treat people like they are broken*

*instead of fixing the system.*

**DEFICIT FOCUS SYSTEMS FOCUS**

1. Easy to identify 1. Difficult to identify (easy to deny)
2. Often lend themselves to quick and easy (cut-and-dried) solutions
3. Often can be solved by an authority or expert
4. Require change in just one or a few places; often contained within organizational boundaries
5. People are generally receptive to deficit solutions
6. Solutions can often be implemented quickly—even by edict
7. Require changes in values, beliefs, roles, relationships, & approaches to work
8. People with the problem do the work of solving it
9. Require change in numerous places; usually cross organizational boundaries
10. People often resist even acknowledging systems challenges.
11. “Solutions” require experiments and new discoveries; they can take a long time to implement and cannot be implemented by edict

**EXAMPLES**

* Take medication to lower blood pressure
* Implement electronic ordering and dispensing of medications in hospitals to reduce errors and drug interactions
* Change lifestyle to eat healthy, get more exercise and lower stress
* Encourage nurses and pharmacists to question and even challenge illegible or dangerous prescriptions by physicians
* Increase penalty for drunk driving • Raise public awareness of the

dangers and effects of drunk driving, targeting teenagers in particular

Adapted from Ronald A. Heifetz & Donald L. Laurie, “The Work of Leadership,” *Harvard Business Review,*

**GROUPSMITH**

January-February 1997; and Ronald A. Heifetz & Marty Linsky,

*Leadership on the Line,* Harvard Business School Press, 2002