

A failure to lead

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William Strampel, the former dean of Michigan State University's College of Osteopathic Medicine, was ordered on Wednesday to serve up to one year in jail. Strampel's sentence stems from accusations that he harassed female medical students and failed to properly oversee Larry Nassar, the former Michigan State professor and USA Gymnastics doctor who sexually abused girls and women under his care.

Strampel was initially charged as part of the Michigan special prosecutor's investigation into how Nassar was able to abuse hundreds of girls and women throughout his two-decade career. However, Strampel's charges are the result of his actions as dean from 2002 to 2017. According to court documents, Strampel used his power as dean to sexually harass, proposition, assault and solicit nude photos from female students. Investigators stated that Strampel's university computer contained pictures of nude and semi-nude young women with Michigan State logo piercings or clothing. The sentences handed down by Judge Joyce Draganchuk, the Ingham County Circuit Court Judge, included 11 months in jail on a count of misconduct in office, and a year in jail on two counts of willful neglect of duty. Strampel will serve those sentences concurrently.

Strampel was sentenced two months after a jury found him guilty of the three charges. Concerning willful neglect, the jury determined there was sufficient evidence to determine that Strampel displayed "complete indifference" regarding whether Nassar followed certain protocols implemented after a complaint of sexual assault by one of Nassar's patients in 2014. The protocols required that a third person be present in the exam room for sensitive procedures by Nassar and limited skin-to-skin contact.

In a public statement following the sentencing, Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel stated "Today's sentencing sends a resoundingly clear message to public officials: If you brandish your power to demean, insult, harass, objectify, and abuse women, you will be held accountable." Strampel is the first Michigan State official to receive a jail sentence resulting from the Nassar investigation. Former Michigan State president Lou Anna Simon and former Michigan State gymnastics coach, Kathy Klages, both face criminal charges in connection with the Nassar investigation.

Strampel's sentencing is another example of a failure in leadership by someone in a position of authority. Strampel had a significant responsibility to the students he served at Michigan State and the patients in Nassar's care. As dean, Strampel was supposed to guide and support the education, careers, and lives of his students. Instead, Strampel betrayed them. Strampel harassed and abused these young women while hiding behind the safety of his title and influence over their future in medicine. As Nassar's boss, Strampel turned a blind eye to years of sexual misconduct. Strampel knew of prior allegations, established measures to mitigate the risk Nassar's practice presented to Michigan State, but failed to ensure Nassar followed the protocols.

Layers of leadership, including Strampel, failed Nassar's victims. Individuals and institutions that were expected to protect these girls and women did not do so. As legal proceedings continue to expose what transpired at all levels, one can only anticipate that self-interest, corrupt intentions, and an unwillingness to learn the truth perpetuated Nassar's crimes. Ultimately, with the support and leadership of those who listened, reported, and prosecuted, the victims became survivors brave enough to share their stories and hold faux leaders accountable.

Given the frequency with which failed leaders like Strampel are exposed, it would come as no surprise if there is growing skepticism, particularly among younger generations, of the integrity and intentions of current business and political leaders. The general public today is seemingly more unwilling than ever to sit back and hope that leaders act in their best interest. Public protests across the country demand action on critical issues of the day, including gun violence, social justice, climate change, and equal pay, because leaders fail to act swiftly or fail to act at all. Athletes and entertainers are also engaged, actively using their celebrity and public platforms to bring attention to many of those same issues. These calls for action demonstrate that change and accountability are not always driven from the top.

Leadership positions are accompanied with titles and power, but neither are determining factors on whether actual leadership exists. When interviewed in the November 2003 issue of *O, The Oprah Magazine*, acclaimed novelist Toni Morrison, who passed away this week, said "If you

have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else." Morrison's words are perpetually relevant and today's leaders should take note.

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