



Leadership Excellence

By Barbara Johnson, PhD

“LEADERSHIP IS AN IDENTIFIABLE SET OF SKILLS AND PRACTICES THAT ARE AVAILABLE TO ALL OF US, NOT JUST A FEW CHARISMATIC MEN AND WOMEN.”

- James Kouzes and Barry Posner

Today's physician must know how to cultivate leadership excellence to thrive in the 21st century. Bypassing the effort needed to become a first rate leader most often results in a dysfunctional medical practice with a great deal of rework and inefficiency. The good news is that strong leadership is a skill that almost anyone can learn. In the National Demonstration Project we found that physicians who developed their leadership capacity were able to: save thousands of dollars annually; get the right people in the right positions; minimize staff turnover; get more done with a smaller, happier staff; reduce key process inefficiencies; and achieve greater patient satisfaction. We have identified five core leadership competencies that are both simple and effective.

1. Personal Mastery
2. Engage others in a shared vision
3. Strengthen others by sharing power
4. Promote practice wide communication
5. Recognize contributions of staff

Personal Mastery - There are two environments that we all operate within: the external (what we experience) and the internal (how we interpret what we experience). The internal environment is where personal mastery is developed. The best leaders cultivate their internal environment by knowing their strengths and the areas they need to continue developing. They are aware of the effect their actions have on others. Exemplary leaders first lead themselves, then they lead others. In the NDP we have noticed that when physicians grow in personal mastery they are able to model the behavior they expect to see from others. Change is much more difficult to achieve when the leadership does not model the change they want to see. The culture of the practice is always modeled by the leaders for better or worse.

Engage others in a shared vision – In the NDP we noticed that when the physicians shared their stories about why becoming part of TransforMED was important to their dreams, the staff was able to understand and embrace their vision. Those practices that had a tougher time enlisting their staff to engage in the change effort had ignored the importance of the leader in envisioning an attractive future for the practice. It is the leader's job to inspire a shared vision and keep the momentum going in a positive direction. When the staff can buy into the dream they will be motivated to contribute to the project. The basic challenge of leadership is to engage the minds and efforts of the staff to work with enthusiasm toward a specific goal, to embrace change and to re-envision their relationship to the practice.

Strengthen others by sharing power – An Achilles heal of many physicians is trying to do too much alone. Great leaders get things done through other people. Sharing power has two major advantages: 1) the leader is not overburdened by work that never gets done or gets done poorly and 2) an empowered staff means leadership at all levels of the practice. Building this type of collaboration develops trust; trust is the glue of every highly functioning group. Involving many people in the project contributes to a group synergy where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

Promote practice wide communication - The leader sets the tone for how communication will be disseminated throughout the practice. One of the best ways to ensure communication practice wide is to have meetings of both the leadership and of sub-groups. These meetings must be regular, effective and efficient to work since poorly run meetings will demoralize rather than motivate. See the article on this web site – “How to run effective meetings.”

Recognize contributions of staff – When staff feels that their contributions are appreciated and recognized they are motivated to bring their best to their job. People become demoralized when the focus is on what they are doing wrong at the expense of what they are doing right. It is part of a leader's job to show appreciation. The most successful NDP practices created a culture of individual recognition and group celebration. To be effective the appreciation must be specific and detailed so the recognition is not viewed as a meaningless exercise.

Closing note - When reviewing the critical variables for leadership success, the Center for Creative Leadership* found the number one success factor to be "relationships with subordinates." The key to success for the new millennium physician leader is the ability to communicate meaningful information and build relationships that motivate staff among all levels of the medical practice. Simply put, leadership is the ability to create a meaningful collaboration among individuals for a common purpose.

The Center for Creative Leadership is an international organization that focuses on leadership education and research. They concentrate on solving the leadership challenges of individuals and organizations throughout the world. Their web site is <http://www.ccl.org/leadership/about/index.aspx>

Additional resources:

Find out more about TransforMED's National Demonstration Project (NDP)
<http://www.transformed.com/ndp.cfm>

Learn about the TransforMED Medical Home model
<http://www.transformed.com/transformed.cfm>

Read relevant TransforMED workingpapers:

8 Tips for Successful Change Management
<http://www.transformed.com/workingPapers/8Tips-changeManagement.pdf>

"Effective Meetings"
<http://www.transformed.com/workingPapers/EffectiveMeetings.pdf>

Huddles: Increased Efficiency in Mere Minutes a Day
<http://www.transformed.com/workingPapers/Huddles.pdf>