

# Leadership in Leaner Times

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# The Importance of Leaders versus Managers

*Clint Maun, CSP*

As I have often said, today's healthcare setting is one of opportunity, change and sometimes confusion. With the constant concern over healthcare reform it's no wonder healthcare organizations, and specifically hospitals, appear to be "caught in the middle". This issue of changing healthcare in America ultimately comes down to attitude. Our profession's attitude can be boiled down to one of three perspectives: either healthcare reform, healthcare deform or healthcare perform.

Individuals who are looking toward healthcare reform see the world totally changing with new and better things to happen. People who look at our changing culture as healthcare deform see the way they have been practicing the business of healthcare changing, and usually believe it is not a good change. They believe it's all going downhill and we "might as well turn most of our organizations into compounds, weather the storm, get our guns ready and hold off the enemy."

The third perspective is an attitude of healthcare perform. This is the attitude which interests me most. By understanding there will be change, some good, some not so good, we can then understand the great opportunity to positively affect the end results for our customers and ourselves. This viewpoint for healthcare perform leads us to the need to be proactive rather than retroactive.

It's been my experience that too many times healthcare providers, and specifically institutional-based providers, have waited for change or programs to be implemented. This has some merit when you don't have all the pieces of the puzzle. However, we have usually found ourselves scurrying in disarray to try to implement new mandates. I believe if we operate as leaders in our environment and in these changing, uncertain times, we will have opportunities like never before. If we simply try to manage the chaos, changes or hassles, we will find ourselves in a retroactive position.

To produce a health care perform attitude, we must realize there are important concepts to embrace. First it includes the ability as leaders to direct the efforts of the organization toward positive key results. We need leadership throughout the organization from the top down. The department manager and other supervisors must be facilitators, catalysts and coaches. We must move ourselves beyond the role of cop, enforcer, quality assurance inspector and so on. We need to develop the spirit of self-check, self-support and self-measurement for all co-workers.

As leaders we need to embrace the concept of Continuous Quality Improvement. By that I mean, adopting the attitude that there is always the opportunity to improve our efforts. This offers improvement opportunities in revenue enhancements, areas of cost containment and quality of programs and services. When we develop or embrace the concept of Continuous Quality Improvement we understand, as leaders, the need to set the tone for our own healthcare reform or perform.

Continuous Quality Improvement or CQI is a major organizational commitment. A Quality Leadership Council should be formed to develop a master plan for CQI implementation to include all of the training, issues, logistics, concerns and methodologies for success of the program. The master plan will be the guiding document which will move you into proactive change. Quality Action Teams will be developed to work on key issues of improvement. Empowerment will be a major, measurable vehicle to determine if you are moving into leadership versus management.

The overall organization will, through the CQI master plan, have measurable key indicators which will target success. All CQI and leadership efforts will be tied to the results. These key indicators will lead the organization based upon their ability to improve processes, systems and people toward the accomplishment of these key indicators.

I am confident that a CQI effort will create an environment of mutual understanding, commitment, empowerment and team effort toward common targets and goals. Your patients (customers) will receive the rewards and you will have your rewards, if committed to an overall team concept.

It's been my experience that developing organizational success based upon individual or fragmented accomplishment produces management oversight. One of the hassles is, the harder we try to manage all parts, it never seems to totally fulfill the whole organizational need. By looking at the effort from a new perspective, we should be able to do whatever the team needs and have all individuals participating toward that series of end results.

The stories about Continuous Quality Improvement are amazing. The successes are individualized and varied across the country, but one thing is for certain, we are in need of a changing set of goals for our organizational leaders. If we can agree that all leadership is tied to team success, then we have made a major step in understanding the difference between leaders versus managers. I believe you will agree this has true potential for defining our own healthcare reform or perform, and it holds the opportunity to move an already great organization to newer heights.

# Follow the Leaders...

## How & Why Anyone Can Take on the Role of Leadership

*Clint Maun, CSP*

"Leadership is the art of getting someone to do something you want done because he wants to do it."

—Dwight D. Eisenhower

It's easy to accept the notion that leaders are confined only to those who have been given the title of "manager" or "boss". But for a moment, you should try to imagine something different. Take a few minutes and try to see a workplace in which every employee does what it takes to help the organization reach its goals—a place where everyone is a leader. Sound impossible? It's not. Things are changing. It's the 21st Century. And it's time to envision a new concept of leadership.

### **A New Definition of Leadership**

When you think of a workplace in which anyone can be a leader, you probably see a place full of chaos and anarchy. Quite the contrary. In fact, spreading leadership and decision-making responsibilities can liberate, inspire, and motivate everyone to achieve more and contribute the maximum.

Quite simply, anyone who decides to make an impact on the values and goals of the organization can be a healthcare leader. A leader is anyone who takes a role of responsibility at any level of the facility. Indeed, it's the employee who understands why even the most menial task is important, who will make a positive impact on both productivity and business results.

A facility in which certain employees take on the roles of leadership can prove to be very beneficial. After all, the boss can't keep watch every waking second of the day, nor should she/he have to. If your healthcare organization plans to succeed in the competitive world market of today, creating and nurturing an environment in which anyone can take on the role of leadership is worth your time.

### **One Important Note**

Before we dive into what it takes to be a leader, how to spot a leader, and how to create a culture in which employees can emerge as a leader, it's important to make a few clarifications. First, by stating that anyone can be a leader we're not trying to say that employees can or should take over the rights and responsibilities given to the boss or manager. Second, we're not suggesting that you go and give every employee the title of leader. The main point here is to be open to the idea that any employee, no matter what rank he or she is on the "totem pole" can take on the task of being a positive role model. By exerting some key characteristics (which will be identified later) and a good attitude, this person can influence other employees and help create a better workplace. In that sense, he or she is being a leader.

## **Discovering Effective Leaders at Your Workplace**

Spotting the individuals who possess effective leadership skills shouldn't take more than some brief observation on your part. You may notice that other workers feel drawn to a certain employee. You may be able to discern that after being in contact with this individual, other employees feel uplifted, inspired and/or motivated. Although no one has ever been able to come up with a perfect formula for leadership characteristics, effective leaders are usually people who possess one or all of these traits:

- Responsible
- Hard Worker
- Compassionate
- Supportive
- Sets worthy goals and achieves them
- Helps other people achieve their goals
- Sets an overall positive example for others to follow
- Tolerates criticism
- Has a willingness to take risks

Effective leaders also use techniques to communicate their belief that each employee is important. Good leaders will speak of employees by name, as opposed to job title. They refer to employees as team members, associates, or colleagues, never as subordinates. They make no distinction between “essential” and “non-essential” staff or “professional” and “non professional” staff. Words have power, including the power to make people feel that they are important to the success of an organization. No matter how small or menial a job may seem, a good leader will be able to communicate how that specific job relates to the big picture. In return, that each employee will see how the role he/she plays makes a contribution to the bottom line.

Lastly, effective leaders can push others in the workplace to finish the task at hand—and perhaps more importantly, make them feel good about doing it. Whether it's the CEO or a part time nurse, a good leader knows they need to communicate the “what's in it for you” factor. For example, an effective leader might tell those employees who are seeking advancement that working in teams will present networking chances and lead to greater opportunities. Or perhaps this leader might present a challenging task in such a way that the employee will feel a sense of achievement and empowerment once it's completed.

Now that you know the characteristics that make up an effective leader and are more apt to discover them, you can now begin to prepare yourself and the workplace for an environment that will help these gifted employees thrive.

## **Preparing Your Facility for a New Style of Leadership**

While some healthcare facilities naturally give way to an environment in which leadership can extend to “rank and file” employees, others need a bit of work. There are some fairly simple steps you can take to get your organization ready for the culture change.

AchieveGlobal, a worldwide consulting firm, conducted a leadership study that involved 2,000 people across 450 organizations. The study explored the critical moments when employees at all levels step forward into leadership roles. The findings are summarized in five key strategies the authors call the CLIMB model of leadership effectiveness. The five strategies are as follows: 1) Create a compelling future. 2) Let the customer drive the organization. 3) Involve every mind. 4) Manage work horizontally. 5) Build personal credibility.

Here's how you can set this model into action:

**Create a compelling future.** Employees will feel more inclined to step up to the challenge of leadership if a powerful vision and mission statement has been defined. If the goals and values of your healthcare organization are clear and compelling, employees will want to take it to the next level.

**Let the customer drive the organization.** Many successful healthcare organizations continue to evolve and thrive based upon both patient and employee feedback. As you know, your frontline employees probably have the most contact with the customer/patient. These employees hold valuable knowledge as to what the customer wants and needs. In today's healthcare environment, communication needs to remain two-way, with feedback from the customer combined with direction from the employees.

**Involve every mind.** Try to give employees and teams the responsibility, resources, training and support they need to improve both their work and the organization. Akio Monta, founder and former chairman of Sony, may have perhaps said it best: "A company will get nowhere if all the thinking is left to management. Everybody in the company must contribute and for the lower level employees their contribution must be more than just manual labor. We insist that all our employees contribute their minds."

**Manage work horizontally.** This simply means delegating work among the entire staff. Passing important tasks throughout the department will help employees build leadership and decision-making skills as well as create trust between you and the department.

**Build personal credibility.** People will want to follow leaders who they can trust. This means setting a good example by walking the talk all the time.

## **Final Thoughts**

While some employees will naturally take on the role of leadership more so than others, the important thing to remember is that regardless of job title, everyone matters. Though they may not want to take on the responsibility of being a leader or making key decisions, it's key that you create a culture in which employees know that they can be a leader if they so choose. Without this opportunity, your organization stands to lose.

# Coaching vs. Counseling

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Two often misunderstood words are: coaching and counseling.

There is a time and place when supervisors/managers need to listen to coworkers and have empathy. Providing some kind of assistance for them when they're experiencing personal troubles or other problems affecting their work is crucial. While counseling should be reserved for those who have the appropriate degrees and licenses, it's important for managers and supervisors to show empathy.

When it's time to address job performance however, it's important to be a coach rather than a counselor. What's the difference? Many managers and supervisors think they can deal with poor job performance with questions such as, "Why did you do that?" or "How did that happen?" or "What were you thinking?" Those types of questions cause the worker to come up with excuses for his or her behavior which gets neither of you closer to solving the problem.

Instead, the performance needs to be coached. Management consultant Paul McGoldnick emphasizes that "what's really important when dealing with unacceptable behavior is to go for the act, not the person." (McGoldnick) Coaching means explaining what went wrong, what behavior needs to be eliminated, what action is needed instead, and how to go about solving the particular problem. This strategy brings the conversation into a venue of ownership of the problem.

The most important thing to remember about coaching people's performance is that until the person owns the problem, he or she will not fix the problem. All the reasons, data, justifications, issues, stories and examples will make no difference. It's important for the person to own the problem and to be an integral part of fixing it. But, merely "declaring that someone else owns the problem is not the end of your responsibility." A supervisor should be an effective teacher—i.e., "coach"—to bring a worker to take ownership of his or her problem(s) and improve their performance. (Miller)

Say, for instance, that Claire's frequent absences on Fridays have turned into an ongoing problem. Asking Claire, "Why are you absent on Fridays?" will only elicit some kind of excuse. "Why," by definition, asks for reasons or excuses, and Claire's response will naturally be just that. "My car didn't start.", "I had a personal issue." or "Something else came up." Get rid of the "why" questions. The issue is not "Why didn't you come to work on Friday?" The issue is "Claire, you didn't come to work on Friday. We need you here on Fridays. Is that a problem? Do I have to have repeated conversations with you about your attendance on Fridays?" Claire has a choice. She can say yes or no. If she says, "Yes, that's a problem," then we proceed to fix the problem. If she says, "No, it's not a problem, but don't keep bugging me because I don't want to work on Fridays," then she doesn't own the problem.

And if Claire doesn't own the problem, she won't fix the problem. So the next question could logically be, "Is it a problem if your frequent absences lead to a written notice in your file?" She again has choices: yes or no. If she says, "Yes, that's a problem, but. . .", she still doesn't own the problem. "Yes, but. . ." still means "no". That's a crucial point to keep in mind when coaching. When someone says, "Yes, I hear what you're saying, "but. . . ." or "however. . .," there is still no ownership of the problem. It's not that person's fault. He or she just doesn't own the problem. And the person is not going to fix the problem without first owning it. Consequently, establishing ownership of the problem is critical.

At some point in time, if Claire won't own the problem of her Friday absences, the supervisor or manager will have to own it and say to her, "Well, Claire, I'll take responsibility for this, and if in the next ninety days you fail to make it in again on a Friday when you're scheduled to work, I am going to put a notice in your file. It will affect your performance review. There will be some consequences because somebody has to take ownership of this situation."

Ultimately, the supervisor's job should not be to own the problem, but "to create the conditions in which the problem can be resolved by those who own it." (Miller) The most efficient way of getting Claire to own the problem is by coaching her performance: defining the problem, pinpointing what needs to be eliminated, and making clear what action or behavior is needed instead. If Claire finally takes ownership of the problem, then she can take an active part in coming up with solutions and a method for measuring her success. She becomes a partner in a win-win situation.

Effective coaching does require "patience and a substantial time investment, but it can help modify an employee's behavior." ("Managing Problem Employees") Spending time asking "why" only gets into head games that will cause the worker to come up with excuses: "Everyone else takes off.", "I have other important things to do.", "I didn't know I was supposed to work all the Fridays.", "People told me I could take off." or "I meant to show up for work but. . .". No one wins a head game. It wastes time and fixes nothing. Leave the counseling to the counselors. Instead, coach the worker's performance.

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