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Vol. V No. 2 Resident Assistance Program Newsletter July 2008

Building the Leader Within: Skills to Develop Now

Your residency can offer opportunities for you to develop your leadership skills. There are a few challenges, however, that you may need to overcome in order to develop this important competency.

“There are a few things about being a doctor that seem to present a challenge for some less experienced doctors who are also trying to lead work teams,” says Rick Rumford, a leadership and communication consultant and principal of On Target Seminars. His clients include University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, The Veterans Health Administration and Media News Group.

“Doctors often have to make quick decisions and the best ones do this with a high level of skill



“Leaders don't create followers,
they create more leaders.”

-Tom Peters

and confidence,” Rumford says. “This strength in the medical area sometimes creates problems with team members when the physician acts or reacts without soliciting the opinions and ideas of team members who are affected by the decision.”

Doctors are in a unique position because they are highly accountable for the medical decisions that they make, Rumford continues. “The most effective doctors are often those who can evaluate a set of data and confidently make a quick decision. Again, this strength in the medical area can have negative consequences when applied to the interpersonal challenge of leading a work team. Most physicians are used to having other people — especially nurses and technicians — act upon their decisions without a lot of discussion. This, of course, is exactly opposite to how most members of a work team want to be treated. This can cause significant problems and can result in that lack of trust that

When you find yourself taking the lead in any situation, it can be challenging to keep your balance. During residency, it can help to have someone listen, provide extra support or a fresh perspective. Not just for crisis situations, your Resident Assistance Program is also a resource for coaching and referrals to resources that can help you excel as a physician and a leader.

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results from poor communication.”

Time pressures in the health care environment can translate into a variety of problem issues for doctors new to team leadership, Rumford notes. “For example, a time-pressed doctor may be unavailable for input that is needed by the team. The team feels at risk making decisions without his or her input and approval. The result may be delayed decisions or poor decisions.”

Another problem doctors can run into is that they often do not have time to provide the critical performance feedback that is necessary for an individual team member to improve. That lack of performance feedback can send the message to the team member that they are not valued.

It's essential for first-time leaders in any work setting to develop good communication skills. “Communication is the lifeblood of any relationship,

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Money Matters

Before a Hurricane Hits, Make Sure Your Finances Are Safe and Sound

As hurricane season swings into high gear, you may be more than ready with fully charged batteries, evacuation plans for loved ones and pets, refilled prescriptions and other precautions. Perhaps you've considered how to deal with the possibility of storm surges, high winds, tornadoes and flooding.

But are you financially prepared? For example, do you have a written inventory of your possessions, along with photos or a video? Do you have multiple copies that are kept in separate, secure locations?

This is one of various helpful tips from the Federal Trade Commission, the nation's consumer protection agency, in "Financial Readiness: As Important as Fully Charged Batteries." To learn more, go to <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/alerts/alt170.shtm>. For more tips on financial management during hurricane season, check out the FTC's Web page on hurricane recovery: <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/microsites/recovery/hurricane/index.html>. Both of these FTC resources have links to other government agencies for general tips on hurricane planning.

The FTC offers free information on a variety of consumer topics. Additional resources for managing your finances and investments can be found at www.munizandassociates.com

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Developing Leadership Skills, *continued*

and that is especially true in the leader's relationship with his or her team members," Rumford says. "Developing and maintaining trust is the most important task for any leader but especially for the new leader."

For the past 18 years, Rumford has asked individuals in his leadership classes to identify the key elements of effective leadership. "Trust and communication are always on their lists," he says. "When I ask the class as a whole to rank the importance of the elements, trust ranks first and communication ranks second."

"When communication breaks down, the first casualty is the level of trust a team member has in the leader. So, in order to gain and maintain trust, a leader must communicate effectively and consistently with each individual team member."

Doctors put into a position of leadership for the first time may think that they need to have all of the answers. But that can be a big mistake, says Rumford. "The truth is that if they are new to leading the team, the team members likely know more about their day-to-day issues than the new leader. Sincerely recognizing and acknowledging the skills and knowledge of the individual team members is critical to building the relationship. Plus, it has the added benefit of increasing the chances for real collaboration and success."

Are You Ready to be a Leader? A Quick Self-Assessment

- Have you had success as a leader in situations outside of work?
- Are you able to see connections between a diverse set of facts and issues?
- Do your actions model the behaviors you expect from others?
- Do you understand your place and role in the organization?
- Are you comfortable taking some reasonable risks?
- Do you recognize and value the strengths of others rather than being threatened by them?
- Do you understand your own strengths and how to use them?
- Do you recognize your weaknesses and how to compensate for them?
- Do you consider yourself a problem-solver?
- Do you have a few failures you can point to as examples of how you can and do learn from mistakes?
- Do you like to collaborate with others?
- Are you comfortable sharing credit?
- Do you have experience evaluating others' work and providing feedback?
- Can you communicate effectively with people who are different from you?

(The more 'yes' answers you have, the better prepared you are to lead.)

Source: Rick Rumford

Resources

On Target Developmental Resources www.ontargetseminars.com
"The Leadership Challenge," James Kouzes and Barry Posner, Jossey-Bass, 2007
"Best Care Anywhere," Phillip Longman, Polipoint Press, 2007
"Learning to Lead," Warren Bennis and Joan Goldsmith, Perseus Books Group, 1997
"Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of Teams," Patrick Lencioni, Jossey-Bass, 2005
"Leading with Questions," Michael Marquardt, Jossey-Bass, 2005