

Leadership Actions and Styles



Doctors should demonstrate leadership skills in order to positively influence team stress levels, job satisfaction and practice profits. After many years of consulting with pediatric practices across the country, we can confidently say, when a doctor is not performing leadership actions, they experience more stress and lower profitability due to lack of planning and low employee job performance, thus resulting in poor functioning systems and teamwork.

Doctors can delegate leadership actions to co-leaders (i.e. office manager, practice administrator, clinical coordinator, etc.); however, the doctor must hold these co-leaders accountable. In today's economic environment of reduced insurance reimbursement, strong leadership is vital for enjoyable and profitable practice performance.

In the book "The Leadership Challenge," James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner define leadership as:

- A process ordinary people use to bring forth the best from themselves and others.
- A set of distinct practices that leaders exhibit when they're doing their best.
- An understandable and universal process.

Anyone can be a great leader if they consistently and successfully carry out the following leadership actions.

Leadership Actions

Constantly evaluate if operations can be improved. Do not settle for the status quo.

- Strive to improve efficiency, systems and staff. There will always be new and better technology and systems.

Have excellent advisors, mentors and support systems.

- These may include an accountant, attorney, banker, insurance advisor, practice management consultant, computer and technology expert, and investment counselor and retirement planner. Find successful professionals who are willing to share their knowledge. Create a support system with colleagues that you can meet with regularly or call for advice.

Lead by example.

- A doctor is in control of the work environment on a daily basis. It can be a healthy environment that is fun and productive or a dysfunctional environment that is stressful and unproductive. The doctor's behavior sets the standard and defines the culture; therefore, the doctor must hold himself to high standards and never behave in ways he would not tolerate from an employee.

Create a healthy business culture.

- Team members can safely communicate open and honestly.
- Expressing a different opinion is not feared. A discussion between parties can take place and a solution or compromise is reached.
- Employees are not afraid to take risks and try new things. They are not fearful of severe admonishment but are comfortable in taking ownership of the mistake and learning from it.
- Praise and support of each other is shared daily.
- Gossip is not allowed.
- Problem employees are held accountable and improve their behavior in a timely manner, or they are removed.
- Problem patients and parents are removed from the practice.

Define your practice vision and share it with the team.

- When all team members are working toward a common vision and goal, the probability of success greatly increases, and the team's energy becomes synergistic.

Practice strong fiscal management.

- Create an annual business plan and set goals that are monitored regularly.
 - Goals to be defined: break-even point, daily producer (doctor, recare, hospital) production, number of producer work days per month, new patients per month, monthly collection, collection ratio, accounts receivable total, overhead expense budget.
- Utilize the reports in the practice management software.
- Update fees yearly.



- Begin saving for retirement early and regularly.
 - Get in the habit of making a monthly deposit into a retirement and/or savings account. Regular deposits and compounding interest can create millions over 20-30 years.

Be people smart — understand different behavior traits and strengths.

- Managing staff effectively and with low stress is one of the biggest challenges doctors face.
- Being people smart is a powerful leadership tool that helps a doctor lead, manage and hire better by understanding:
 - People possess a variety of behavior traits that impact job performance differently.
 - A person's strengths and limitations and how to hire and coach effectively.
 - Each person's motivators that will empower them to be more productive and in turn experience greater job satisfaction.
- The Professional DynaMetric Programs (PDP), a worldwide leader in top-of-the-line behavioral assessment solutions for business, defined the four behavior traits as dominance (take charge), extroversion (people), pace (patience) and conformity (detail/systems).
 - Each trait has high and low behavioral intensities. One of these four traits will be a person's strongest and dictate 50-70 percent of their natural behavior and responses.

Hold employees accountable.

- Many doctors find it difficult to talk to an employee about poor job performance issues such as skill level, attitude, tardiness, absenteeism and teamwork. Most doctors either avoid this necessary leadership task or do it poorly because it feels confrontational and they do not have a format to follow, thus missing a valuable coaching opportunity.
- When a doctor does not hold employees accountable for proper job performance, it becomes demoralizing and good workers will lose respect for the doctor. Team morale and productivity drop and eventually the good workers get frustrated and leave for other jobs. However, when employees are promptly held accountable for proper job performance, the doctor's reward will be an enjoyable, high functioning team that supports the practice vision.

Motivate with praise, appreciation and recognition.

- Encourage employee's development and growth. Know each employee's goals and motivators and try to create them in the work place.
- Make employees feel part of the team, that they matter and make a positive impact.
- Give recognition and a compliment for a job well done at least once a week to each employee.

Hold regular meetings.

- Morning meetings
 - Exchanging important team and patient information helps the team focus on how to get through the day's schedule with reduced stress and increased production.
- Monthly Team meetings
 - Discuss work patterns between departments and team members that need improvement.
 - Practice monitors are discussed to see if goals are met and problem solve what new actions can be taken if they are not.
- Quarterly Department meetings
 - There can be up to four departments in a pediatric dental office; front desk, restorative assistants, recare and management. Each department meets quarterly with the doctor and office manager to discuss and problem solve department specific issues, job duties and system changes.
- Monthly Marketing meeting.
 - Evaluate marketing efforts and decide on new actions.

Celebrate success.

- Recognize the team's efforts and celebrate achieving goals.

Leadership Styles

Two common leadership styles are the task-oriented leader and the transformational or relational leader. Each style has positive attributes, but does not include the full set of skills for successfully completing the above leadership actions. A combination of both styles is needed to assure employees complete tasks, set up systems and pay attention to details while also fostering a sense of belonging and recognition for the employee. A doctor is more effective as a leader if they create relationships and build trust with their employees.



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A Task-Oriented Leader

- Has a high standard for themselves and others.
- Leads the team by setting specific goals for the practice and each employee, then evaluates, corrects and trains the team to ensure that expected results are achieved through close supervision of each team member.
- Detailed and loves structure, has schedules, standard operating procedures and step-by-step plans in place.
- Logical and analytical and gets tasks done in a timely manner.
- Guided with a sense of fairness when rewarding or punishing employees.
- Can be conflict-avoidant and not hold employees accountable in a timely manner.

Transformational or Relational Leader

- Shares their vision for the practice with team members so the team is working toward common goals.
- Focuses more on the big picture than details.
- Likes to delegate to co-leaders that are attentive to detail and organization to help run the practice.
- Is a risk taker. Always looking for new ways to accomplish tasks effectively and efficiently to meet the bottom line.
- Supports and develops employees beyond formal

job descriptions by knowing their individual motivators and goals and encouraging the them to achieve them.

- Encourages employees to think forward, be creative and contribute ideas that can positively impact practice performance.

What is your style?

- Understand your current leadership style and strengths or weaknesses? Ask yourself the following questions and look for ways to improve your leadership:
 - Am I fully embracing the leadership role?
 - What is my natural leadership style; Task-oriented or transformational/relational?
 - Do I perform the leadership actions listed above? What can I start doing or do better?
 - Do I regularly share my vision for the practice with the team? Are we going in that direction?
 - Is there a healthy practice culture?
 - Do I help foster a sense of belonging with employees?
 - Do I hold employees accountable in a timely manner?
 - Do I recognize individual employees for their contributions?
 - Do we celebrate successes?

“The difference between where we are and where we want to be is created by the changes we are willing to make in our lives.”

~ John Maxwell



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