

Teaching Managers to be Leaders: A Practical, Hands-on Approach

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The leadership behaviors of an organization's management have a profound impact on business outcomes. In healthcare – as in all industries – leaders' skills affect employee engagement, which influences productivity and impacts the bottom line. Because leadership behaviors can be measured and improved, organizations can increase employee engagement and impact productivity by investing in leadership skill development at all levels of the organization.

In a hospital setting, leadership behavior also impacts the quality of care delivery. Because of the undisputed relationship between leadership behavior and employee engagement, hospitals following best practices in healthcare delivery systems emphasize the development of leadership skills, including self-management and communications proficiency. Investment in the development of these core skills affects a manager's ability to lead effectively on a daily basis toward achieving an organization's goals.

When used well, these skills also contribute to an environment rich with positive employee relations. When an organization's leaders have strong self-management, communication, coaching and team leadership skills, employees are more apt to have positive relationships with their managers instead of seeking solutions offered by an external, third party.

How Managers See Themselves

While many managers understand that effective leadership depends in part on the need to refresh existing interpersonal skills and acquire new ones, not all make this a priority. As a result, employee engagement and productivity suffer. Our surveys and experience prior to designing and implementing the LEAD Academy, a 12-module leadership development experience, showed that in-depth behaviorally-based leadership training is a needed component in a well-functioning, successful healthcare organization.

In order to understand leaders' self-perceptions, we surveyed managers and supervisors from more than a

dozen healthcare facilities. The survey focused on self-perceptions about specific skills among hospital leadership, ranging from unit leaders to directors.

Our survey asked participants to rate themselves in the following generic areas:

- Communications skills
- Coaching employees
- Leadership style
- Setting expectations
- Evaluating performance
- Providing feedback
- Managing change

The responses were striking, and demonstrated a strong desire by respondents to enhance their skills in each of these areas. On average, only 16 percent reported enough confidence to rate their skills as strong enough to forgo further training. Seventeen percent felt their skills were weak enough to actively need help in the area in question, and the remaining 67 percent recognized a need for improvement.

Additionally, through further research and interviews we discovered that:

- 31% of supervisors and managers received no formal management training prior to entering a leadership position
- 46% of those who had received training had attended only a seminar about a given topic
- Only 11% had received a formal certification or degree as part of their leadership preparation
- 54% had been serving in a leadership role for less than three years
- More than one-third of supervisors and managers were spending five or more hours each week on administrative duties. None spent less than one hour.

With this clear desire for enhanced leadership skills among these healthcare managers, we developed the LEAD Academy, a tools-based training academy designed to help supervisors and managers become more effective communicators and leaders.

LEADing

The Academy was designed as a 12-module curriculum, with sessions spread over a period of several months, or in some cases several years. Drawing

upon behavioral assessment tools including the DISC Assessment and the Team Health Audit, we targeted 12 generic areas in which to improve participants’ skills. By the conclusion of the curriculum Academy graduates have experienced intensive skill-building in the following areas:

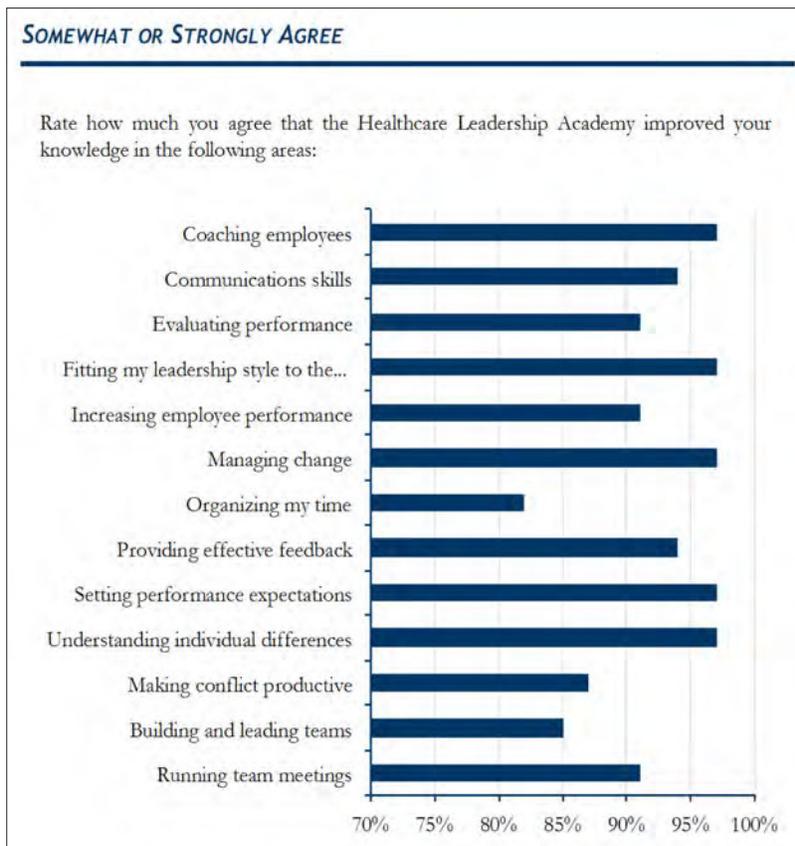
- Principles of Leadership
- Leading People Differently
- Leadership Communication Best Practices
- Coaching Employees to Higher Performance
- Leading Others through Change
- Managing Performance
- Building and Leading Effective Teams
- Planning and Running Effective Team Meetings
- Resolving Interpersonal Conflict
- Organizing Time, Work and Priorities

- Why and How of Organizational Policies
- Business and Finance for Today’s Healthcare Leader

Post-Academy Feedback

Upon completion of the Academy, we asked the participants to provide feedback, specifically how the learning affected self-perceptions about their knowledge, skills and abilities. After attending the Academy, the difference in how these managers perceived their skills showed a remarkable improvement relative to the pre-course survey.

We asked Academy graduates to rate if they believed the courses improved their knowledge and capability in the following areas. The chart on this page illustrates the percentage of participants who “somewhat” or “strongly” agreed that they did.



For an even deeper understanding of the specific changes the Academy would make to their work lives, academy participants were surveyed about three challenge points related to skill development: the time they spent dealing with conflict, time spent mentoring their direct reports and time spent on administrative duties. Here, too, there were noticeable improvements in each category.

The time spent dealing with conflict declined

slightly. Upon further inquiry, we learned that Academy alumni believed that while actual time spent dealing with conflict remained almost unchanged, the time spent managing this responsibility with employees after the Academy was used more constructively, meaning graduates believed they had acquired the skills to respond to conflict positively instead of avoiding it or exacerbating it, which were common practices in the past.

One-on-one coaching also experienced positive gains. Coaching direct reports became a higher priority for managers after attending the Academy, especially among those who were doing little coaching before the experience.

Finally, there were measurable gains in time saved on administrative duties. The pre-academy survey showed 35 percent of managers spent five or more hours per week handling administrative duties. This dropped to 21 percent after the training, allowing more time for coaching and team-development activities.

Lessons Learned

For various reasons, not all organizations make leadership training a priority. The results from the Academy and its pre- and post-surveys suggest that there are tangible benefits to investing in leadership skill development throughout a hospital's management structure. In particular, the pre-academy survey indicated a high level of uncertainty and perceived inexperience among managers. After attending the Academy, many of these leaders believed they had acquired the tools and skills to lead, manage and communicate more effectively, as reflected by the measurable change in self-perception seen in the post-course surveys.

These gains in productivity and self-confidence make a clear case for investing in leadership skill development among a hospital's managers, from front-line supervisors to senior leadership. A well-trained, confident managerial team will enhance an organization's productivity by cultivating exceptional leadership skills and pro-actively engaging employees.

Changing how managers lead is more than simple leadership development – it is a means to achieving desired business outcomes.

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