

## 5 Ways to Boost Your Leadership Skills

by Carolyn Merriman, President, Corporate Health Group

As we reach mid-year, now is the prime opportunity to reflect on the state of your organization and your role in its success. Is your marketplace position what you want? Are you achieving your goals on pace with the original plan? And most importantly, are you — as an individual — doing the right things to help achieve positive outcomes? Are you communicating your role in those outcomes?

Today's healthcare workplace is a frantic environment. But, effecting change in an organization starts with you, as an individual leader. By taking a look inward, you can position yourself as a better leader for your team. You have the tools within you (or can take steps to acquire these tools) to improve the outcomes of projects that you do for your organization. But how do you identify them and use them in your everyday leadership responsibilities?

Even the most seasoned executives among us need to step back and assess how we're doing. Are you truly walking the talk and motivating your team? Consider these five ways to boost your leadership skills.

### 1. Put a greater emphasis on integrity.

Set the tone. Are you focused on inspiring your team through your words and actions? Look at yourself as others view you. Concentrate on being a positive, effective role model. When you adopt a "glass-is-half-full" perspective, others will follow suit. Treat situations with integrity, humor and grace. Make these a part of your demeanor and you'll find you'll get the same back from your colleagues. How your team performs is a direct result of how you lead.

### 2. Focus on real, personal communication.

Don't hide away in your office. Relying too heavily on voice mail and e-mail for efficiency leads to assumptions. You miss out on intuitive dialogue and don't share the important thoughts that can only be exchanged by talking to each other. Make an effort to talk face-to-face. Really listen to what that person is saying, find out what they're doing day-to-day and show that you understand what they face. Create an atmosphere of communication, trust and respect.

### 3. Empower the people around you.

Engage your team every day. Show that you value what they bring to the table. Too often, middle management staff hesitates to move forward, even if senior management has approved a strategy because they've been burned before. Empower everyone in your organization to implement the plan. Seek out their ideas and advice on strategies and tactics to support the department's initiatives. Hold weekly meetings away from the office. Appoint a "leader of the week" to conduct the meeting while you sit back. Encourage creative, solution-oriented thinking. Give

positive feedback in public, and voice concerns in private. Build a “coaching” method of leading; people respond to guidance, mentoring and a demonstration of the outcomes you desire. Observe the pride of ownership your team will have as a result.

#### **4. Squash silo thinking.**

In attempting to protect what’s ours, silo thinking has become a pattern of behavior. We lose sight of our core business, become fragmented and fail to build a strategy that’s good for the organization. Bring together your individual teams and re-emphasize the value of working together to achieve common goals. Demonstrate to your team how each of their actions has a direct effect on the efforts of the whole group. Illustrate this by examining marketing results, sales numbers, attendance at meetings or the way people follow up (or perhaps fail to) in e-mail, phone calls or face- to-face.

#### **5. Avoid reacting and start acting.**

We always think there’s no time to think about our strategy, test it or get others involved in it. Concentrate on acting, not reacting. Delegate responsibilities on a project. Empower others to take action. Stay focused on the reason your organization is in business in the first place.



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