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Become One of Healthcare's New Leaders

by Donald H. Hutton, FACE

Have you reviewed your executive development program? Does it focus on the elements that will prepare you to become one of the "new leaders" that boards are searching for? The talents and strengths that made CEOs successful in the past may not be enough to handle tomorrow's challenges. In fact, in the June 24, 2002, issue of Modern Hospital, Paul Mango, a principal of the nationally renowned management consulting firm McKinsey & Company, said, "The (hospital) industry has outgrown much of the executive leadership that has grown up in it." Change is coming fast, and hospital boards are looking for CEOs who can keep up.

As a CEO, you must have a program in place that focuses on developing the following skills and qualities essential for tomorrow's leaders.

1. Be self-aware. Having an accurate picture of who you are and how others view you is essential to identifying your strengths and discovering your blind spots. We all have a vision of what we would like to be, but seldom is that vision accurate. There are many qualified testing services that can help you learn more about yourself as an individual and as a leader. If there is something about you that you would like to change, work with qualified persons to help you make those changes. As for your strengths, use them to your personal and organization's advantage.

2. Seek feedback from others. Feedback about your performance from those around you is critical to your success. Understanding how the board, medical staff, and executive team view your performance gives you insight into how effective your leadership is within the organization. Finding out what others think seems like an easy task to achieve, but many healthcare organizations miss the mark by not using an outside source to collect and report such information. Studies show that the most accurate feedback comes when an independent party collects and reports the information about the CEO.

3. Maintain focus and discipline. Setting and defining stretch goals is a standard procedure. Stretch goals are used not to drive short-term action but to inspire long-term innovation aimed at making desirable outcomes achievable at some future time. Most CEOs report that their organizations only achieve 50 to 60 percent of these goals. To outperform their competitors, healthcare organizations must be able to achieve between 90 to 100 percent of them. As a CEO, you must have the discipline to not lose sight of what the organization has defined as imperative to its success.

4. Be accountable. As a CEO, the spot-light is on you to make sure you behave in an ethical and honest fashion. The many examples of CEO behavior in companies like Enron, WorldCom, and Andersen have drawn attention to CEOs in all industries. The healthcare field has few examples of such behavior; however, that doesn't mean the CEO is not under a watchful eye. The public's expectations are tougher than the government's rules and regulations. The new leaders of tomorrow must be sure they are leading their organization down the straight and narrow path; there is no room for venturing into questionable business practices. Review ACHE's Code of Ethics to be certain you are abiding by the intent as well as the code.

5. Lead a balanced life. Most of us fall into the trap of thinking that more work will create better outcomes. The truth is, the CEO who has a balanced life will be the one who achieves more success. CEOs have learned that if they are too focused on work activities, they may miss out on a contextual occurrence of some significance. Allow yourself more downtime to recharge your mind and body's energy. Spend time with family and friends, exercise,

or take up a hobby. When you spend some time in the “being” state, your mind is more receptive to insights about the business and the environment surrounding your organization.

6. Demonstrate a sense of humility. Your ability to have the proper perspective of your importance and role is key to being a great leader. To be humble is not a sign of weakness; rather it is a sign of strong character. Being receptive to others’ thoughts and suggestions, even when they are counter to your own beliefs, will permit you to grow and learn. The power of multiple minds is immense, and it is the engine that drives successful organizations. Leaders will succeed because they are humble enough to know they do not have all the answers, and they know the wisdom of others will make them better leaders.

Developing these qualities and abilities will prepare you to better lead your healthcare organization now and in the future, and they will help you distinguish yourself from other CEOs.

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