

The Six P's of Physician Leadership: A Primer for Emerging and Developing Leaders

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A recent article in the Harvard Business Review titled, Why the Best Hospitals Are Managed by Doctors, explores the many reasons why physicians can make good managers and leaders in healthcare. However deep within the article the authors include the tag line, "... and how training can make them even better." Numerous articles have been published over the past decade calling out the need for physician leader development. The long-held belief that physicians, by virtue of their natural leadership abilities and completion of many years of medical education, are automatically ready to lead at the highest levels of healthcare has been dismissed. Yet it is difficult for physicians to read about leadership in addition to the ever changing clinical literature needed to maintain competence in practice. The

Six Ps of Physician Leadership (Figure 1) is a short and easy read that highlights key competencies for emerging physician leaders to develop and senior leaders to self-reflect upon so that we as physicians can develop into strategic level healthcare leaders.

"Having an understanding of the importance of relationships leads to the ultimate goal of building high-performing teams." People, the first "P," is probably one of the most written about of the six, and yet one of the toughest ones to implement. As Jim Collins said in the book Good to Great, "great vision without great people is irrelevant." Cultivating relationships, whether building new, maintaining existing, or maneuvering old ones, is essential to building the right team at the right time with the right mix to accomplish the mission. It can take a career to become successful in the art of relationship management. Above all, it is important to be true and loyal to one's self and we are as individuals. That is the bedrock principle in working with others. Cultivating relationships

Figure 1 – The Six Ps of Physician Leadership

People	Process
Presence	Perspective
Politics	Principles of Business

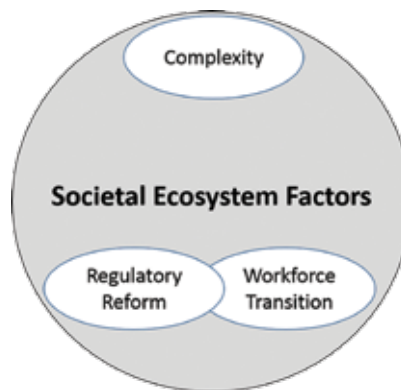
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can require a lot of self-disclosure, a powerful but potentially dangerous tool. Storytelling, one of the most common ways of practicing self-disclosure, can be a very effective tool but has the ability, if done improperly, to destroy a reputation and relationships. Be cautious in what you disclose about yourself, be humble, but not too humble, and be careful with personal stories as it is difficult to know how others will perceive them. When leading people, it is also vital to appreciate how socioeconomic factors can promote change in our workforce (Figure 2). Complexity, regulatory reform, and workforce transition all significantly impact the attitudes, beliefs and values of people. Thus, managers of people must be cognizant of current happenings and trends in these areas such as the potential changes to national healthcare policy, and the emergence of the millennial generation as patients and employees.

“Remember that as physician leaders and as clinicians you are only as good as your reputation.” Presence refers to how we portray ourselves through verbal and non-verbal actions. It’s about building your reputation, working within it, and maintaining it. Presence requires a fine balance between being genuine vs. revealing too much. With the advent of the digital age, the latter has become more problematic. We all know that as physician leaders and military officers, we must portray an executive persona and are under 24/7/365 scrutiny. Presence in cyberspace has emerged over the past decades with the growth of the internet and social media. Specific caution needs to be given when writing e-mail messages to ensure they are professional and don’t unintentionally convey the wrong message. Practical advice for e-mail etiquette includes: using font that is appropriate for reading, avoid using colors or extra punctuation, keep the e-mail to less than one paragraph whenever possible, avoid using all caps unless you are trying to yell, properly address the e-mail to the intended person, and be sure to sign the e-mail. Of course when in doubt or for sensitive topics, it may be better to opt for telephonic or in-person communication. While cyberspace is becoming an ever bigger part of portraying ourselves, our physical presence, both verbal and non-verbal is still just as important in our overall presence. Don’t forget about how you physically portray yourself at work, at home, and in the community. Be genuine, but be cautious to avoid portraying too much personal information in order to avoid damaging your presence.

“Be strategic, be political, and be effective.” The third P refers to politics. I will not belabor this topic as I believe we all know and recognize that there are politics involved in every aspect of our lives. The practice of politics as a physician leader includes the art of influencing people, being attuned to the informal communications network, and empowering your staff while embracing collaboration and remaining strategic. All these principles are important but empowering our staff is something that bears particular attention. We talk about this in the military as allowing our subordinates

Figure 2 – Societal Ecosystem Factors Effecting Change



to fail. The book makes the same point of physician leaders. An effective physician leader “understands the need to let people find their own way.” The theory of empowering staff runs through many leadership books including If Disney Ran Your Hospital: 9 ½ Things You Would Do Differently by Fred Lee. It is an important concept and can strengthen the satisfaction and loyalty of our staff. Even with this, a political physician leader must avoid triangulation, which is working through a third party to get to someone else. Triangulation is an easy trap to fall into, and I’m sure we have all done it, but we must try to actively avoid it at all costs as it has a tendency to backfire. Work directly with the intended party whenever possible and avoid triangulation.

“Leaders need to understand the means by which their goals and objectives will be achieved.” Process focuses on the ability to be aware of what is going on and generating improvement. For a successful physician leader, being aware includes the ability to parallel track. Multi-tasking, which recent literature has denounced as a viable process, is not the same as parallel tracking which can be learned and improved upon through exercises. The most famous of which is the invisible gorilla experiment which we have likely all seen. An example of parallel tracking is the ability to be a participant in a meeting and process the meeting content at the same time. Parallel tracking leads to awareness, which leads to improvement, another area of process in which the physician leader needs to be knowledgeable. We do not need to be experts in all performance improvement tools, but at least have a familiarity with performance improvement processes. As a physician leader, we should enable our staff to progress forward using improvement tools. We can enable change by being aware of our surroundings and embracing process improvement methodologies.

“Good judgment comes from bad experience.” Perspective is the art of “seeing what others choose not to see.” Perspectives are guided by our own frame of reference. The successful physician leader needs to be able to change their view and see things from multiple perspectives. This can be done by ensuring that we surround ourselves with people who bring multiple perspectives to

the table. This has recently been cited as a necessary component of the Root Cause Analysis process, including those who can provide an outside perspective in the case. In healthcare, we must never forget the perspective of the patient in all we do. Gaining perspective is a learned attribute and one that any physician leader can hone if they dedicate time and self-reflection to improving. Identifying troubling trends requires perspective, as does monitoring the current levels of healthcare reform. Continue to develop your perspectives and never forget the myriad others required to completely understand today's healthcare environment.

“Today's leader needs to have a firm understanding of business and strategy principles.” The last P refers to the Principles of Business. Business is an integral part of healthcare. An operating understanding of finance, economics, marketing, and other business principles is essential to being a successful physician leader. These skills can be obtained through on-the-job training, short courses offered locally, or by obtaining a graduate degree such as an MBA, MHA, MPH, MMM, or the like. Every business leader, whether established or aspiring, needs to continually work to improve their understanding of the principles of business in order to be successful. Particular attention needs to be given to the disruptors of innovation: technology, the business model, and the value network (Figure 3) which are the primary drivers of healthcare innovation and something with which a leader of healthcare must become familiar.

The Six P's of Physician Leadership offers principles to be embraced by emerging and developed leaders alike. Whether you are at the start of your leadership journey or towards the end, these principles offer a roadmap for self-reflection and personal growth. Physicians are well positioned to lead within all aspects

Figure 3 – Elements of Disruptive Innovation

Element	Description
Technological enabler	New technologies that bring new solutions to the forefront.
Business model innovation	Delivery models for putting new enablers in practice.
Value network	The infrastructure that supports the delivery models and technological enablers.

of healthcare. Physicians, however, are not adequately trained to lead at strategic levels. The principles in this book provide a springboard for the necessary growth and development of physicians to lead the strategic transformation of healthcare going forward.

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