



LEADERSHIP; OUR FUTURE AND CHANGE: BUILDING EFFECTIVE LEADERS FOR HOME CARE

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The home care industry received a shot in the arm with the passing of legislation that effectively delays competitive bidding, thanks in part to the efforts of home care providers, manufacturers and industry leaders. This latest action allows home care providers the latitude to retrench and develop a lasting strategy to deal with the onslaught of challenges imposed by Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). In addition to reimbursement issues many other factors affect the home care industry creating a challenge for leaders. Internal and external factors are presenting rapid change, unprecedented in our young history. Health care costs, technology, changes in health care financing and regulations, patient uncertainty in dealing with changes and safety issues are only some of the challenges that can consume time and energies of a home care leader. The need for effective leadership is greater now more than ever before and in order to prepare for challenges yet to come we need to develop our future leaders and equip them with the tools and skills necessary for effective leadership. Home care will undergo significant change and these changes will demand that home care providers reinvent themselves with increased emphasis on quality, values and ethics with a comprehensive focus on developing leadership. The premise of leadership is centered specifically on the people responsible for shaping the future of home care. These include the home care clinicians, executives, and managers charged with meeting ever increasing demand for care in their communities in the face of labor shortages, budget shortfalls, economic woes, cranky physicians and increased scrutiny at every turn. These folks grapple with a pressing need to modernize care delivery and the tools they must use to survive in a healthcare world that is increasingly global and competitive with shrinking resources. We must leverage the knowledge and experience of our current leaders to support the development of new leaders who'll be charged to deal with the ongoing challenges the home care industry will face. We must change how we've approached running our business; how we deal with the challenges imposed by policy makers; challenge the process they've used to determine what is reimbursed; how much is afforded for reimburse-

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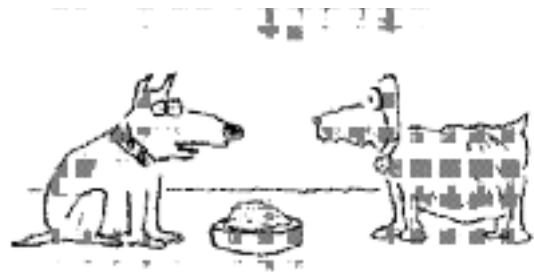
ment and home care providers must engender the development of leadership amongst personnel in their organization as we continue to educate those responsible for decisions regarding the home care industry.

Focus on Leadership

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Leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes. Leadership is the energetic process of getting people fully and willingly committed to a new and sustainable course of action, to meet commonly agreed objectives while having commonly held values. Leadership is a relationship; is everyone's business and most importantly is a set of skills and abilities. The fact of the matter is that leadership is not innate in all home care providers however some personality traits (Trait Theory) may lead people naturally into leadership roles. In addition a crisis (Great Event Theory) or important event may cause a person to rise to the occasion, which brings out extraordinary leadership qualities in an ordinary person. However some people simply choose to become leaders (Transformational Leadership Theory). Leadership development must be linked to organizational needs as leadership is no longer a "rite of passage". Leadership development must be strategically linked to organizational goals as different lessons are learned from different types of experiences. Leadership is bread from challenging experiences that drives the learning forward and makes an experience developmental. The lessons learned from experience can have

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"Of course I have pet peeves...I'm a pet!"

Leadership.. Continued from previous page

a lasting impact on how a person manages and leads. Preferably leadership must have a variety of experiences in order to achieve broad and balanced development.

Some basic questions must be asked in order to determine whether or not an individual challenges themselves to develop leadership traits. Examples of questions include but are not limited to: What can I do to learn the most from my job experiences? What new strategies should I try? What obstacles will I need to overcome? Research on the most admired companies reports that top organizations take aggressive, innovative approaches to improve leadership at all levels by focusing on assessments and leadership development programs that address individual needs and the organization's strategic goals. In establishing a focus on developing new leaders, consider where your organization is and where it should be going and review your vision statements and think about the ways in which those vision statements support the development of leaders in your organization. Predict what the major barriers to progress in leadership development might be and how they might be overcome and observe what other leaders in the industry are doing to create motivating visions and supporting goals. Be alert for events that might impede your progress and remain vigilant and aware of opportunities that enhance your organization's leadership.

Our current industry leaders have honed their skills through years of experience and professional development. They're a part of organizations that focus on leadership development. All home care providers must ensure they in fact have a process to develop new leaders and as such must assess themselves to determine if enough time is spent on leadership development. Evaluate the way your organization uses its resources and monitors progress towards its goals and think of and experiment with changes that might improve the way things are done in your organization. Essential to the process is the need to identify the operational and administrative problems that cause trouble. Work with highly engaged employees as well as external resources to resolve the problems. Leaders must establish a system for monitoring progress, giving feedback and revising goals as needed. Work with subordinates to set specific performance goals and think of several ways to provide subordinates with education, training, travel opportunities, increased responsibility, and other learning activities. In addition be understanding, support subordinates and cultivate in them the traits that build the leadership skills to ensure a pipeline of effective leaders. We have been very fortunate to have current industry leaders who many refer to as luminaries; individuals who are influential in the halls of congress and with CMS. We all know these leaders who continue to be very visible and active on behalf of the home care industry. However, these elder statesmen and women will soon be transitioning to the status of retiree, so in order to ensure we continue to make inroads for the future of our industry we must invest time to develop 'new' leaders.

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