

Leadership & Professional Development: Emotional intelligence strengthens leadership presence

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“Leadership is like beauty—it’s hard to define but you know it when you see it”.

—Warren G. Bennis

Not all bosses are leaders and not all leaders are bosses. Physicians' perception of both personal and organizational values is associated with their immediate supervisors' leadership behavior.¹ The leadership qualities of physician supervisors influence individual physicians' well-being and satisfaction as well as organizational success. Although leadership was not in our medical school curriculum, it is a fundamental skill for hospitalists' daily practice. Hospitalists are leaders regardless of organizational titles and can use the skills of emotional intelligence to further develop leadership presence. The term emotional intelligence refers to our ability to identify, logically reason, and manage our own emotions, rather than act impulsively based on how we feel about a situation. Internal medicine department chairs identified emotional intelligence as the most essential element for their success.² These department chairs also shared their experiences of the derailment of leaders and high turnover due to the absence of emotional intelligence. A systematic review of physician leadership and emotional intelligence highlighted that emotional intelligence is vital to physician leadership development throughout their careers.³ Four keys to consider building your emotional intelligence follow.

SELF-AWARENESS

Self-awareness, a foundation of emotional intelligence, is the art of knowing and accepting ourselves, even the parts that are hard to see or understand. It is a crucial way of developing friendly relationships with our authentic selves. Self-aware individuals are more fulfilled, more confident, and more likely to get promoted.

A self-aware leader is mindful of emotional triggers, biases, and strengths. We cannot always control other people's emotions, actions, and words; however, we can take responsibility for our own emotions, actions, and words.

SELF-REFLECTION

Self-reflection can help hone self-awareness. For example, when receiving a negative performance evaluation, asking, “How can I improve?” instead of “Why did this happen?” will actively focus on finding a solution rather than engaging in self-destructive rumination. Furthermore, another crucial strategy is actively seeking honest feedback from diverse individuals with the goal of utilizing the feedback to enhance self-reflection.

ACTIVE LISTENING

This behavior equips leaders to learn from those at the front line about novel approaches to solving problems and barriers to overcome. Active listening fosters a psychologically safe environment by promoting respect and empathy by acknowledging and validating emotions, allowing individuals to feel comfortable sharing their concerns and challenges. When a leader does not know how to listen and analyze a new idea brought forward by others, people stop sharing their input which can be an obstacle to organizational growth.

LEARNING FROM MISTAKES

Taking responsibility for our mistakes gives us the courage to learn the lessons. While it is not always easy to learn from our missteps, learning from mistakes is a lifelong process. Every day presents an

opportunity to invest in small habit changes that can accumulate over time, like compound interest. Sometimes, we could be our worst critics. Forgiving ourselves is critical to embrace our errors as opportunities for growth and let them guide us toward a more fulfilling and successful life.

You do not need a formal title to lead. Developing key skills in emotional intelligence can empower you as a physician leader and amplify your impact on patient care.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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