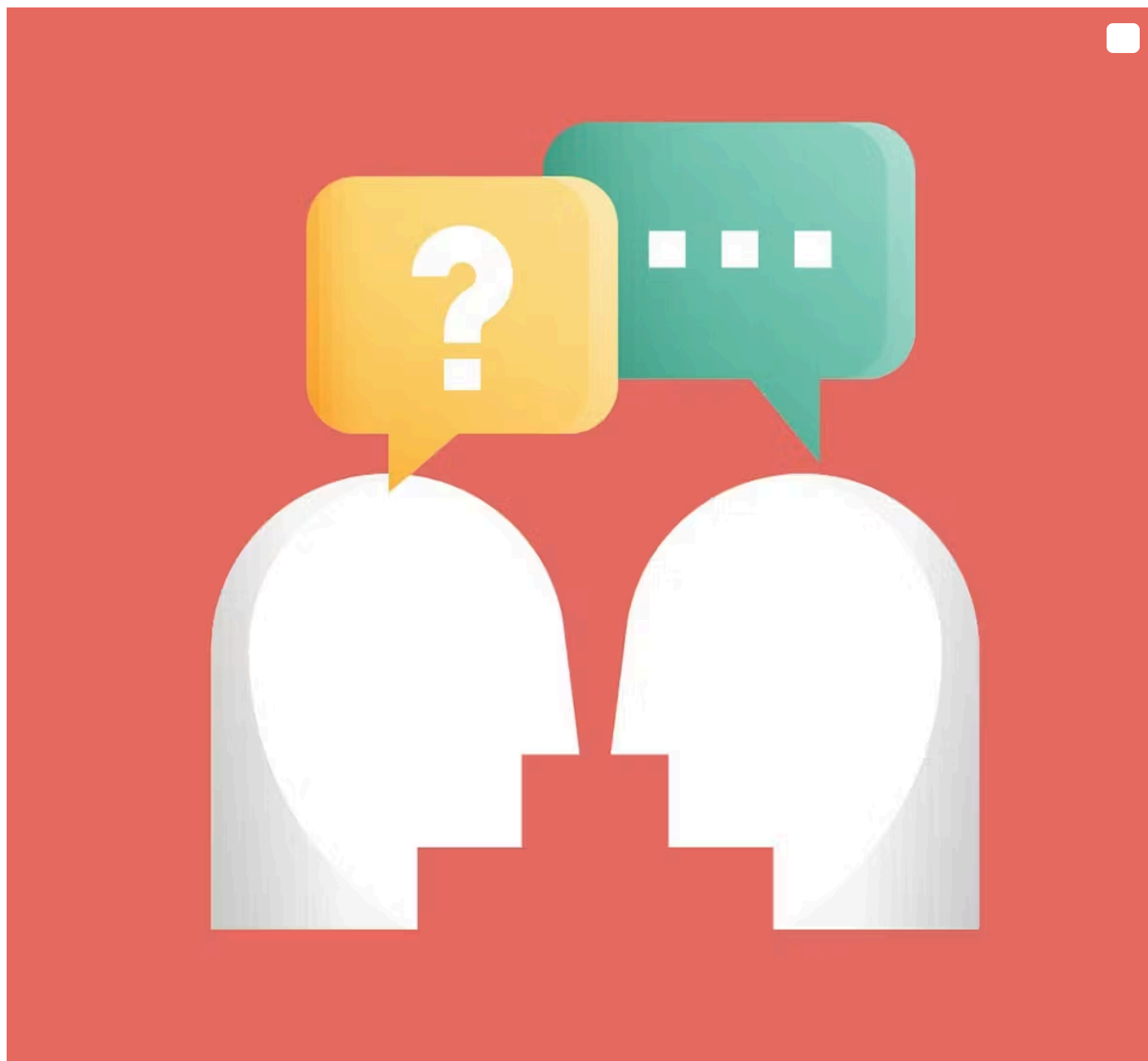




## MANAGEMENT

# Coaching corner

Patty J. Eschliman, MHA, MLS(ASCP)CM, DLMCM, CPC

**Now that CLIA has approved the Doctor of Clinical Laboratory Science (DCLS), what can the industry do to raise awareness of the importance of our profession at this level? The history of laboratory medicine shows the tremendous contribution of our field, as well as the severe shortage of professionals at all levels. Will there be infighting between the various laboratory organizations or will there finally be a united position that will develop, recognize, and promote the high quality of care a DCLS can provide?**

**Dear DCLS:**

I too share your opinion that the DCLS has a valuable part to play in laboratory medicine and will be significant in helping healthcare settings and ordering providers with the level of expertise needed to champion appropriate test utilization which will drive down healthcare costs and improve patient care. Just as Pharm-Ds contribute to patient rounds by improving treatment plans, DCLS professionals will play a key role in advancing laboratory medicine. It has been a long time coming as those of us in the trenches have observed. It is simply impossible for clinicians to know the details and value of every laboratory test. As MLS Laboratory Directors or Managers, we can implement strategies to guide test ordering but are often met with resistance due to our perceived lack of standing in the medical community. We needed the doctoral degree to stand out and stand at the head of the table to be recognized for our knowledge and impact. I strongly believe this will not cause infighting. Much like the collaboration that occurred in 2009 between ASCLS's National Credentialing Agency (NCA) and ASCP's Board of Registry (BOR) to develop what is now the ASCP Board of Certification, these two great organizations are focused on how

laboratory medicine contributes to quality patient care and the excellence of credentialed professionals in our industry. Work is underway for a credentialing exam to bring recognition to the DCLS as a new certification.

## How do you think the relationship works between proper dressing, personal comportment, and patient care?

### Dear Professional:

I use this title as you have highlighted key qualities of professionalism. I will be transparent and tell you that I had to look up the word "comportment" which means "behavior" or how one "carries themselves." Thank you! I love extending my vocabulary AND you hit the nail on the head! We can all go to MLT, MLS, or Phlebotomy school and most of us will do well and pass our certification exams, but what is the secret sauce for those who truly succeed and those who struggle? It is how they build trust in relationships. In healthcare, the most important trusting relationship you can build is with the patient. I often tell my phlebotomy friends that they are the most important part of the laboratory team. First, it is their quality sample that produces a quality result. The best scientist and chemistry analyzer cannot "fix" hemolysis. Second, it is the phlebotomist that is interacting directly with the patient. There have been multiple studies done on the link between positive patient outcomes and the level of trust patients feel with their healthcare providers. One such example is AIDET, which is a communication tool developed by the Studer Group to enhance interactions between healthcare professionals and patients. AIDET is an acronym that stands for Acknowledge, Introduce, Duration, Explanation, and Thank you.<sup>1</sup> This is what a phlebotomist does every time they enter a patient room, and it builds trust when all healthcare professionals follow the same guidelines.

A non-verbal communication tool that builds trust is proper attire. Most hospitals will have a dress code or certain color of scrubs that distinguishes one department from another so that patients can easily identify which professional has entered their room to provide care. This helps reduce anxiety and build familiarity with the healthcare team. How you dress and your professional appearance builds trust.

Finally, a patient is always watching the interactions of their team and how they work together to provide them with care. If a doctor is unkind to a nurse or a nurse is unkind to a phlebotomist in front of a patient, do you think this builds trust or destroys the trust a patient might have regarding the care they are receiving? A team member's behavior outside patient areas also matters. If you are working in the lab with a toxic co-worker who is rude, lazy, or displays unexpected verbal outbursts, this can be distracting and cause unnecessary stress. The nature of laboratory medicine can be stressful enough with the demands for exactness, quality, and timely reporting. It can become intolerable to work in a negative environment that goes unchecked by leadership. If you encounter inappropriate behaviors that affect team culture, please inform your supervisor so that expectations regarding conduct can be properly communicated. If it is your leader that is causing issues, then go to your human resource department with your concerns. No one wants to lose good team members due to a poor working environment when this can be addressed and improved.

**What is the best way to get team members to speak up about their concerns or questions during a medium sized (10–15 people) collaborative interdepartmental meeting? I am leading a project where most people either keep their thoughts to themselves, or they send me a direct message right after the meeting to ask a question that would benefit the whole group.**

**Dear Team Builder:**

There is a lack of trust between the members on this team. Since this is interdepartmental, perhaps there has been some miscommunication in the past or hard feelings between the departments that make it challenging to feel vulnerable. This is often a barrier to trust, the fear of speaking up and experiencing negative consequences. I don't know how long your team has been meeting, but it is never too late to start talking about trust and what is getting in the way.

Most everyone hates team building exercises, especially anything that makes them get out of their chair, but there are some things that you can do to help people clear up any internal barriers that come with mistrust. 1) You can hand out sticky notes and have each person write down their negative thoughts. Then take a trash can and have each person tear up their sticky note and throw them away. You can describe how this is getting rid of the mucky muck that is interfering with collaboration. 2) You can set an intention for each meeting: Provide an agenda that starts with a list of intentions. "For this meeting I am willing to be.... Appreciative, Attentive, Clear, Compassionate, Courageous, etc." List at least 15–20 intentions. Have each member circle three and then go around the group and have each person read aloud their intentions. In my experiences, people start to share why they picked that intention for the meeting. The more people start to share, the more they get to know one another, and this opens the door for trust. 3) You can also set ground rules for each meeting. "What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas." No one should be oversharing outside of the group, undermining trust. If there are concerns about trust provided to you after the meeting, share that concern with the group anonymously so that it is out in the open and people can start having honest dialog about what is preventing trust within the group. If you want an example of a meeting agenda that includes intentions and ground rules, please email me for an example at [patty@thelableadercoach.com](mailto:patty@thelableadercoach.com).

## Help! I hate my job, what do I do?

### Dear Desperate:

You haven't given me a lot to work with but I can tell you that no one should be miserable day in and day out in their job. Medical Laboratory Science is a meaningful, important, and fantastic profession that provides many opportunities. Is it the culture? Talk to your supervisor on how your environment is impacting your ability to enjoy your work. Is it the type of work? Maybe you would excel in Microbiology where testing is more "hands on" than with the instrument automation in Chemistry. Is it the pay? Research your opportunities for shift differential or extra shifts that pay overtime. Is it staff interactions or

leadership communication? Talk with other leaders in the organization — your boss's boss or Human Resources. Make sure your core values match the organization you work for. Maybe for-profit healthcare is not your thing, maybe hospital work is too much, maybe you would like to sell or fix laboratory equipment. Join a professional organization, attend a meeting or two, network, and meet like-minded people who can recommend other opportunities. Or – you can always hire a coach!

**We need successful medical laboratory professionals to engage on social media platforms to bring attention to the laboratory and the importance of qualified board-certified medical laboratory professionals — and counter the negativity with the options and opportunities available.**

**Dear Social Media:**

I couldn't agree with you more! You can always follow our professional organizations on social media; there are some groups that do not permit negativity such as the private group Laboratory Leadership on Facebook. It is easy to start your own scheduled posts too if you subscribe to social media manager software. You can schedule positive posts days or weeks in advance. I use Publer: <https://app.publer.com>.

**I live in an area with significant weather swings. This past winter was rough, and I got written up for missing too many days. I can't believe they were so mean! Do they want me to die on the way to work?**

**Dear Snowboarder:**

No, I am sure that your supervisors do not want you to die or even risk your life, which is why your facility probably had other options for you to "shelter in place" if there was a significant storm approaching. I, myself, have a blow-up mattress tucked under my desk for such occasions. Why? Because our patients need us and someone must be there to take care of them. Patients do not get to choose

when they get sick or have health emergencies. As laboratory professionals, we are part of an elite healthcare team that have made a commitment to our patients regardless of the weather. Sure, we all get sick or miss a day now and then. Perhaps you tried your best to dig yourself out of the snow and was unsuccessful, but for you to get to the point where you were written up tells me that your absences are excessive as defined by policy. Your supervisor was not being mean. They are responsible for ensuring sufficient staff to provide quality testing. This is your wake-up call to see if you are really a good fit for healthcare. I believe it is a privilege to be a part of this meaningful and important work, but it demands a lot from us. If it means that your grandmother had a heart attack and I am there to run her troponin values so she can survive, it is all worth it. What do you think?

## Reference

1. The AIDET® communication framework. Huronconsultinggroup.com. Accessed July 17, 2025.  
<https://www.huronconsultinggroup.com/insights/aidet-communication-framework>.

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## About the Author



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