



Are You Ready to Be a Transformational Leader?

What's holding you back from successfully making quality improvements in your healthcare work environment? Would it surprise you to know that most healthcare providers and leaders state relational rather than technical factors as being the most common barriers standing in the way of improvement?¹ So how do you go from stalemate to success? Become a transformational leader and talk it out!

With so many stressful demands filling the day, it's hard to set aside time to address what may not seem to be necessary work. But taking the time to get to the heart of a relationship problem goes a long way to getting better productivity and financial results from the "real work" with the bonus of better patient satisfaction and employee retention.

Working in a highly stressful environment can turn the most accomplished leader into someone who works counterproductive to his or her goals. It can be easy to forget or ignore some basic rules of how to get others on

board with your vision. After all, we are programmed to react to social stress. When others don't cooperate with what we want to achieve, we may leap to conclusions, lay blame and stick to strong convictions that become destructive to relationships. The key is to recognize that this is happening and to be willing to make a change, starting with yourself.

So what is a transformational leader?

Anyone has the ability to bring about transformation, whether they hold a position of authority or not. Successful transformational

leaders have learned to maintain their leadership abilities despite the stress that occurs around them daily. According to Dr. Neil Baker, an authority on developing transformational leadership skills, there are five steps that will help to build up relationships, rather than destroy them and ultimately lead to successful quality improvement within an organization.

Step 1: Acknowledge there is a problem

When you have strong convictions, this can become destructive to relationships. If you find your team does not seem to share your passion or vision and is not

cooperating the way you would like them to, think about why this is happening. Ask yourself if you have been forcing your opinion on others instead of asking for their opinion. Have you been leaping to conclusions rather than asking them for clarification? In other words, is there unbalanced participation? If so, take a step back and acknowledge that this is happening, then you can begin to repair the damage. This may be a difficult task, as it takes courage to admit you were wrong and to be willing to begin the process of mending relationships.

Step 2: Reflect and prepare for a conversation

Start by thinking about how you have been reacting to conflict. Instead of viewing people who resist your changes as something that you have to fix, look at this as an opportunity to explore other ideas that will get everyone on board. People want to feel like their opinion counts. For balanced participation, you need to be willing to ask if things are working or not working and explore every idea. You also need to understand that people may be afraid of the changes you are asking them to make. Even if the changes are needed, someone may resist them because they feel they will be losing something, such as a role, relationships, comfort or status.¹ Chances are, reasonable people act “unreasonably” for a good reason. This is your opportunity to find out

why, which leads us to the third step.

Step 3: Have an active dialogue

A successful dialogue can only happen if you are willing to let go of your convictions and let the other person or people be heard and understood. You do this through what Dr. Baker calls “active telling” and “active listening.”

Remember, breakdown in productivity can occur when the “leader” gets stuck in one action. Your conversation should lead to an understanding of other people’s aims and challenges. Together you can create multiple options for actions that will get everyone working towards “intrinsic motivation.” This occurs when everyone has an intrinsic interest and enthusiasm to motivate them to make a change. You have to acknowledge that other people may work in a different experiential environment and their opinion is valuable and necessary for successful implementation of changes that will work.

An active dialogue entails active listening. This means asking the

other person what their ideas and perceptions are. Then let them know how you interpret what they said, ask them if that is what they meant and what they base their opinion on. This avoids jumping to conclusions that may not be accurate, avoids unnecessary conflict and fosters a positive relationship.

Likewise, after you have listened to the other person, ask if you can share your ideas and perceptions. Then ask them what they heard you say and if they understand what you are basing your opinion on. Further, ask them for their opinion on whether they perceive anything to be wrong about what you are suggesting.

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Step 4: Decision time

Now it’s time to make a decision based on everyone’s input. Sometimes, despite exploring everyone’s desires, you may have to make a call that not everyone agrees with. The important thing is to acknowledge this and move towards problem-solving: how can you deal with their concerns versus forcing compliance? The goal is to aim for high quality consensus on a decision that everyone can live with and commit to fully. Your job is to find a way to engage everyone.

Step 5: Follow-up

Once you've got everyone committed to the goal you have come to a consensus on, don't stop the conversations. It will take continuous communication to maintain this alignment. This should include meetings on an individual basis as well as with the team.

Are you ready to be a transformational leader?

In your next conversation, set aside decision-making and instead try to really understand somebody through active listening. It's simple to do, but it may take you out of your comfort zone — and that takes courage. Treat each conversation as a building block for the quality improvements you are working towards.

1. Baker NJ, Suchman A, Rawlins D. Hidden in plain view: barriers to quality improvement. *Physician Leaders J* 2016 Mar-Apr;3(2):54-7. Available at: <http://www.physicianleaders.org/news/plj-articles/2016-march-april/2016/03/04/hidden-in-plain-view>.

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