EMBRACING THE LEADERSHIP ROLE

Command vs. Leadership

First, let’s distinguish command from leadership. Command refers to the final decision maker: the charge nurse on the unit, the physician on the care team, or the department head at the hospital. Command is not about “who’s responsible,” because we are ALL responsible. It’s not about “who’s the leader,” because we ALL need to be leaders. In general, command refers to the person making the ultimate decision, whether it is regarding staffing, the care plan, or policy. With command comes responsibility. Those of you “in command” have a responsibility to take care of your coworkers, communicate openly and freely to them, solicit input at all levels, foster a sense of teamwork, brief your team on the plan, debrief them to improve future performance, disavow perfection, and set the example for everyone to follow. Failing to fulfill even one of these responsibilities will weaken your team and negatively influence the care provided to your patients. Yes—that is a lot of responsibility, especially when you weave it in with your primary task of providing patient care.

In contrast to command, leadership imposes responsibilities to EVERYONE on the team. Each of us has a leadership role that will improve teamwork, enhance our safety culture, and provide better care for our patients. Let’s review how all of us—physicians, techs, nurses, admins, PAs, and others—can fulfill our leadership role.
Learning to Lead
First, we can add to our leadership role by creating a positive team climate where everyone feels that their input is valued and considered. Although the physician or charge nurse plays the major role in establishing the team climate, everyone can contribute by choosing how they react and interact. Attitude is a choice. We can choose to be dragged down by the grouch/pessimist/dictator, or we can put forth the effort to shift the climate to a more positive atmosphere.

Mentoring is another way to exhibit leadership. Mentoring is a tricky skill that often requires practice and balance to ensure that you’re taking the best approach for the person you’re working with. Everyone on the team has a responsibility to share knowledge—the better each individual’s skills are, the better the team is. By helping to bring colleagues’ skills to a higher level through mentorship, you are better able to employ delegation as a workload management tool, thereby enhancing the team’s performance.

Professionalism is another critical element of leadership. Remaining professional in all circumstances instills confidence, sets the correct example, and creates a climate for optimal performance. Hallmarks of professionalism include the ability to behave professionally at all times (even if you aren’t thinking professionally) and to always expand and improve your skills and knowledge.

The final element of leadership is conflict management. Identifying conflict and recognizing the most appropriate time to resolve it is a difficult skill to develop. If you recall, conflict actually increases in high-performing teams because people do not accept sub-standard performance or lapses in behavior. When an error is made, team members are quick to point it out with the goal of mitigating the error and improving future performance. This type of conflict is good and can be managed relatively easily as long as the culture fosters process improvement rather than blame. Personality issues can be more difficult to manage. This is where you can be a leader and attempt to resolve conflict by remaining neutral, fostering improved communications and mutual understanding, and seeking to find common ground by focusing on the best care for the patient.

Final Thoughts
This concludes our e-brief series. We hope these monthly publications have inspired you to continue to appreciate and employ the CRM skills you learned in your live training session with us. Culture change is a slow process that will be successful only when all team members recognize its importance and work toward implementing it. Embrace your leadership role and help make your hospital a model of teamwork and communication excellence.

© 2011 Mach One Leadership, Inc. All rights reserved.

Published by The Duke University School of Medicine and Med-IQ.

This activity is supported by an educational grant from sanofi-aventis U.S.