



Oklahoma State Board of Examiners for Long Term Care Administrators

TO THOSE STARTING A CAREER AS A LONG TERM CARE EXECUTIVE...

All of us know that effective organizations must be well trained, motivated, and have a sense of confidence that can only be forged through strong leadership.

All of the pioneers in the long term care field and those that have followed know that an organization's real strength lies with its people. Our "mission" is not done by machines; it is done by people. The best tools, regardless of what those may be, are of little value without trained and motivated people to operate and support them. People in leadership positions have a special responsibility to develop and support the high quality people who will carry this particular "field" of healthcare into a better future. It is not an "industry" as we don't deal with "widgets" but a very specific "field" of healthcare. And ours is not a "job" but a "profession" within this field.

In this field, and in this profession, we hear a lot about "passion." This is WHY we do what we do and we really must start there. In fact, with any undertaking requiring or involving leadership, that is where it starts. But, what is this thing called "passion?" Is it like "art" in that *we know it when we see it?* I don't think so. I think it's a pretty fine line actually and actually comes down to caring. When we work hard for something we DON'T care about, that is called "stress." But, when we work hard for something that we DO care about, and love, THAT is called "passion." You know it when you experience it. Do you work after hours because you have to or because you want to? Or maybe it's some of both.

I challenge each of you to prepare yourself for the role of leadership you are stepping into, and to take the time to teach those who will follow you. The balance of this handout is designed to help each of you meet this responsibility. If you're not already excited about becoming a leader in this field and this profession, GET EXCITED! Start studying about leadership and management! Leadership is an ART and management is a SCIENCE. Continue to try to master both! It's what's expected (and needed) in this profession. As a lifelong "student" of leadership myself, I recommend the participation in such an ongoing study to continually improve yourself as a professional executive in this field. It is, after all, ONE of the domains of practice...and an important one!

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LEADERSHIP

This handout provides a basic guide for the new and aspiring leader. It also presents a useful review for those already in leadership positions. A practical knowledge of leadership fundamentals is absolutely essential to effective leaders. The handout first discusses a concept of leadership and some basic traits and principles that I've become familiar with in my own journey of becoming a leader. Second, it presents a situational approach to the leadership challenge, with comments on the key elements of any leadership problem: the mission, the people, the leader, and the environment. The final portion of the handout addresses leadership preparation actions.

THE LEADERSHIP CONCEPT

Leadership is the art of influencing and directing people to accomplish the mission. The basic concept the effective leader must keep in mind encompasses two fundamental elements:

- **The mission**
- **The people**

This is the concept of leadership we urge you to adopt, and all facets of your leadership style should support these two basic elements. They are embedded in the definition of leadership.

The mission. The primary task of any organization is to perform its mission. This is paramount, and everything else must be subordinate to this objective. Thus, the leader's primary responsibility is to lead people to carry out the mission successfully. No matter how well you apply the art of leadership (and leadership IS an art), no matter how strong your organization is or how high the morale of your people is, if your leadership is not directed completely toward the mission, your leadership has failed. Yet, in a major balancing feat, a leader must never forget the importance of the people.

The people. People perform the mission. They are the heart of the organization and without their support the organization will fail. A leader's responsibilities include the care and support of the organization's people. Successful leaders have continually ensured that the needs of the people in their organization are met promptly and properly.

Clearly, the two "simple" parts of the leadership concept—mission and people—are actually two very complicated elements. Successful leaders who have effectively dealt with this complex concept (and balance) have exhibited certain characteristics or traits.

LEADERSHIP TRAITS

Effective leaders have certain distinguishing characteristics which are the foundation for their approach to the leadership situation. The list of a leader's desirable qualities is virtually endless. While many characteristics (such as truthfulness) are expected of all members of any profession, there are six traits which are vital to leaders.

Integrity—a total commitment to the highest personal and professional standards. A leader must be honest and fair. Integrity means establishing a set of values and adhering to those values.

Integrity is the fundamental premise of trusted leadership. Without integrity, the moral pillars of public trust and self-respect are lost. Integrity is MUCH more than mere honesty and we could spend a LOT of time discussing this one trait which “integrates” so many others. Understanding this one trait starts with understanding yourself and your own values because you integrate those values into your actions which radiate what you are all about. TRUST has two dimensions: Competence and integrity. We will forgive mistakes of competence. Mistakes of integrity are harder to overcome.

Loyalty—a three-dimensional trait which includes faithfulness to superiors, peers, and subordinates. Leaders must first display an unquestionable sense of loyalty before they can expect members of their organization to be loyal. Turning to our military to learn about this topic, we note that General George S. Patton, Jr. highlighted the importance of loyalty saying, *“There is a great deal of talk about loyalty from the bottom to the top. Loyalty from the top down is even more necessary and much less prevalent.”*

Commitment—complete devotion to duty. A leader must demonstrate total dedication to the organization and the people it serves. Dedicated service is the hallmark of all leaders.

Energy—an enthusiasm and drive to take the initiative. Let your “passion” shine through. Throughout history successful leaders have demonstrated the importance of mental and physical energy. They approached assigned tasks aggressively. Their preparation included physical and mental conditioning which enabled them to look and act the part. Once a course of action was determined, they had the perseverance and stamina to stay on course until the job was completed. Yes, I said it (and will say it again) – your *physical condition* IS important, too!

Decisiveness—a willingness to act. A leader must have the self-confidence to make timely decisions. The leader must then effectively communicate the decisions to the organization. Of course, decisiveness includes the willingness to accept responsibility. Leaders are always accountable—when things go right and when things go wrong. And there IS a difference between accountability and responsibility. When you’re responsible for something, you’ll do “okay” with it; but when you are held accountable (or hold yourself accountable) for it, the results are truly much more impressive and positive. That works when you hold your subordinates accountable, too.

Selflessness—sacrificing personal requirements for a greater cause. Leaders must think of performing the mission and caring for the welfare of the people in the organization. Leaders cannot place their own comfort or convenience before the mission or the people. Willingness to sacrifice is intrinsic to any type of service. Selflessness also includes the courage to face and overcome difficulties. While courage is often thought of as an unselfish willingness to confront physical dangers, equally important—and more likely to be tested on a daily basis—is the moral courage a leader needs to make difficult decisions. It requires courage and strength of character to confront a tough situation head-on rather than avoiding it by passing the buck to someone else. These traits are essential to effective leadership. Developing these characteristics will improve a leader’s ability to employ the principles of leadership.

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES

Leadership principles are rules or guides that have been tested and proven over the years by successful leaders. The most important of these principles are discussed below:

Know your job. People will follow a competent person who has the knowledge needed to complete the mission successfully. The leader should have a broad view of the unit's mission, and must make sure all members of the organization understand how their jobs relate to mission accomplishment. Just as important as their own competence, leaders ensure assigned people know their responsibilities. One expects a leader to demonstrate in their daily performance a thorough knowledge of their own job and further an ability to train their subordinates in their duties and thereafter to supervise and evaluate their work.

Know yourself. Knowing your own strengths and weaknesses is important to successful leadership. You, the leader, must recognize your personal capabilities and limitations. Everyone wants to be an effective leader. You can and will be IF you identify your strengths, capitalize on them, and consciously strive to reduce and minimize the times you apply your style inappropriately.

Set the example. You must set the standard for the people. People will emulate your standards of personal conduct, and even appearance. They will observe your negative characteristics as well as your positive ones. An arrogant or domineering person commands no respect, only resentment. The supervisor who violates basic standards of morality invariably ends up in a compromising situation. A leader who drinks excessively or who abuses controlled drugs sends a dangerous message: *I cannot control myself; how can I control you?* Lack of self-discipline in a leader destroys the organization's cohesion and, ultimately impairs its ability to perform the mission. Self-discipline also pertains to physical fitness. People who are in good physical condition are better prepared for any assigned mission. Setting the example includes supporting a physical fitness program. Therefore, leaders must be positive examples of professional conduct, appearance, and physical conditioning. Essentially, people do not expect their leader to be a saint. But they do want leadership from a person who recognizes the importance of example.

Care for people. Take care of the people. Find out what their requirements are and be sensitive to human needs. Are the people housed adequately; are they well fed; are they paid properly and promptly; are there personal problems with which they need help? When people are worried about these conditions, they cannot focus their full attention on their job, and the mission will suffer. If people believe they are cared for as well as circumstances will permit, the leader is in a position to earn their confidence, respect, and loyalty.

Communicate. Information should flow continuously throughout the organization. Information is an essential link between wise leadership and purposeful action. Communication is a two-way process. An informed leader is able to evaluate realistically the unit's progress toward mission accomplishment. Successful leaders listen to what their people have to say, and are always looking for the good ideas which can flow up the chain. It is also important to emphasize the importance of feedback. The worker who is well informed concerning the quality of the work and its importance within the job will be more effective and more highly motivated. It is the leader's

job to keep all channels open. The more senior a leader becomes, the more listening skills will be required.

Educate. People should be properly trained to do their jobs. Continuing education, professional development education, technical training, in-service training and on-the-job training are normal means by which people are trained. Informal training, practice, and personal experience at the foundation level are crucial reinforcements to formal training. The results, outcomes and penalties for employing untrained/uneducated personnel are extremely appalling.

Equip. It is also your responsibility to ensure the organization is equipped properly. People should not be sent ill-equipped to accomplish the mission. Your leadership responsibilities include identifying needs, securing funds, and then obtaining the necessary equipment.

Motivate. Your greatest challenge is motivating subordinates to achieve the high standards set for them. Motivation is the moving force behind successful leadership. In fact, the ability to generate enthusiasm about the mission may be the single most important factor in leadership. Recognition of the efforts people put forth is one positive way in which motivation toward mission accomplishment pays dividends. The leader who publicly applauds the efforts of the organization's people builds a cohesive organization which will accomplish the mission. Motivating people depends on understanding their needs and working to align these needs with the organization's requirements. Most people will work for an organization which they know cares about them, and one in whose mission they believe. Remember, the most powerful form of lasting motivation is self-motivation. One of your goals as a leader should be to provide an environment that fosters and rewards self-motivation.

Accept your responsibility. As a leader you are responsible for performing the unit's mission. If you fail, you are ultimately also accountable for the consequences. Any unwillingness to accept responsibility for failure destroys your credibility as a leader and breaks the bond of respect and loyalty. Accountability also includes the requirement for discipline within an organization. A leader should reward a job well done and punish those who fail to meet their responsibilities or established standards. The former is easy, even enjoyable (and too often neglected or taken for granted); the latter is much more difficult, but equally necessary.

Develop teamwork. As a leader you must mold a collection of individual performers into a cohesive team which works together to accomplish the mission. The organization's mission will suffer if each person in your organization is "doing his own thing" in isolation. As the leader, you should know how the various functions within the unit fit together and how they must work in harmony. You should create and maintain an atmosphere of teamwork and cooperation to meet mission demands. Teamwork comes when people are willing to put the unit's mission before all else.

THE LEADERSHIP SITUATION

Leadership has been defined as the art of influencing and directing people to accomplish the mission. Management is the manner in which resources are used to achieve objectives. Leaders should also be aware of their responsibilities as managers, but there is a clear distinction between leadership and management. The leader and those who follow the leader represent one of the oldest, most natural, and most effective of all human relationships. The manager and those he manages are a later product with neither so romantic, nor as inspiring a history. *Managers give directions...instructions to explain "how."* *Leaders give direction...the vision offered to explain "why."* Leadership is of the spirit, compounded of personality and vision—its practice is an art. Management is of the mind, more a matter of accurate calculation, statistics, methods, timetables, and routine—its practice is a science. Managers are necessary; leaders are essential.

Bottom line, *you lead people and you manage things*. This profession, this field, and your organization, need people who can do both and know when to do which. The requirement is for the proper division of attention between the two, with the proportion dependent on the situation. Each leadership situation should be approached by paying careful attention to the four primary factors: the mission, the people, the leader, and the environment.

The Mission

Most missions involve many tasks that must be completed if the organization is to fulfill its responsibilities. The leader must define the mission and set priorities for its various components. In many instances the mission has been defined by a higher authority (corporate, governing board, etc). Yet, the leader should translate the higher direction into goals with which people will relate.

When possible, the leader should involve the organization's people in setting these goals to ensure their support and "buy in." Individual involvement is very important when total effort is needed from everyone. The goals must be challenging but attainable. Goals that are unrealistic frustrate even the most dedicated people. Set reasonable and acceptable standards of job performance to make sure that goals are met. These standards must be consistent with the mission, and defined clearly for every individual.

Recognize those who meet or exceed standards, prescribe additional training for those who cannot, and take corrective action for those who will not. When standards are not met, you must determine the reason and move quickly to correct the situation through training or, if appropriate, administrative or disciplinary action. Get the facts; then act.

The People

Be sensitive to people. People perform the mission. Understanding people helps determine the appropriate leadership action to take in a given situation. You cannot be totally successful at getting the most out of people without first knowing the capabilities of those you are leading. Capability has two principal elements: training and experience.

Training. You should assess the level of the organization's training. If the people are not trained, do what it takes to get them the necessary training. People joined your organization to be part of a team with an important mission. They cannot do it without proper training.

Experience. Levels of experience vary widely. A leader should learn each individual's experience and ability to perform in various situations. Do not base your evaluation of an individual's experience solely on their position or length of service. While these may be good overall experience indicators, the person may have never done a particular job or been in a particular environment before—and there are those who learn faster than others. Knowing the experience or knowledge level of the organization's personnel is an important aspect of the style chosen by the leader.

The Leader

Successful leaders adapt their leadership style to meet the mission demands, and use an approach which capitalizes on their strengths. For example, if you are able to communicate effectively with people on an individual basis but are uncomfortable when speaking to large groups, then use personal conferences as much as possible. If you write well, take advantage of this skill by writing letters of appreciation or using other forms of correspondence.

In addition to capitalizing on your strengths and minimizing your weaknesses, your style of leadership must correspond to the people's job knowledge. When they lack sufficient knowledge to do the job at hand, you must spend too much of your time directing their efforts to accomplish the mission.

On the other hand, if people have some training or experience, you are not required to direct their every action and should not do so. Still, you must motivate them to complete the task. Work with them, but keep your eye on the objective.

Occasionally, you may discover that people are only moderately motivated to do a job they are capable of completing. In such circumstances, let them participate in planning the task. Motivate them by maintaining a job-related working relationship. Their capabilities will do the rest. When the people have extensive experience and are enthusiastic about the task, you should provide them greater freedom to complete it the way they choose. You, as the leader, are still ultimately responsible for the mission, so stay informed of the group's progress.

There is no one perfect leadership style. Rather, the most effective style is the one which the leader tailors to the mission, the people, and the *environment*, which is discussed next.

The Environment

Leaders should carefully consider the environment in which they work. Leadership methods which worked in one situation with one group may not work with the same group in a different environment. Various problems create an entirely new environment with which the unit's leader must cope. As a leader, you must alter your leadership behavior, as necessary, to accommodate changes in the environment of the given mission. Be sensitive to your surroundings.

LEADERSHIP PREPARATION

Now that we have touched on some of the basics of leadership, here is how you can best prepare yourself to lead:

Think about leadership. What would you do in a given situation, and why? If you were placed in charge of your work unit tomorrow, how would you act? Remember the traits and principles of leadership.

Observe leaders in action. How does your boss handle a given situation? Why did a particular action succeed or fail? How does your supervisor lead?

Study leadership and management. Read about the successful leaders in our history and how they led. The study of history lies at the foundation of all sound conclusions and practice. Detailed professional knowledge is essential to developing perspective and in preparing to meet the challenges of the future.

Practice leadership. Look for opportunities to exercise leadership. It can be as simple as taking the initiative and leading one person to complete a task. Learn from your efforts, seek feedback, and evaluate your efforts. Always lead by positive example.

SUMMARY

Leadership is the art of influencing and directing people to accomplish a mission. The concept of leadership we've shared with you has two elements—the mission and the people who must perform it. Several basic traits are common to successful leaders. Effective leaders are also aware of the principles of leadership.

Every leadership situation has four key factors: the mission, the people, the leader, and the environment. Careful consideration of these factors enables the leader to select the proper approach to each situation. *There is no single leadership style which is appropriate in every situation*; therefore, effective leaders learn to use the correct approach as dictated by the circumstances...

And there is a lot more to leadership. This handout only glances the topic and hopefully whets your appetite to learn more about other aspects such as the sources of power and other concepts such as the "zone of indifference" and other nuances and theories. It's a rewarding study!

Your role is one of a leader and your success depends on positive, effective leaders at all levels to perform the mission. Leadership in this field is not the private domain or responsibility of our profession. It is a responsibility for which every person involved must prepare.

Long term care leaders are not born; they're educated, trained, and made, as in every other profession. Therefore, we must always remain dedicated to this process, continuing to educate ourselves as well as our subordinates who are leaders at a different level and may one day, when we have fulfilled our role properly, be the among next generation of leaders.