

## Leading from a staff or clinical position

**W**ould you like to see changes made in the way your work is organized and processed? Is your pharmacy department on the cutting edge of the changes in health care or barely maintaining the status quo? Does your superior include you in planning and appropriate decision-making? Do you consider yourself a leader or just a staff pharmacist or just a clinical practitioner?

### Every pharmacist must be a leader.

As a pharmacist, you are already a manager on your shift or in your practice. A manager generally makes sure that things are continually done correctly. So the pharmacist's responsibility to ensure appropriate therapy for patients and the accuracy of each prepared dose requires management skills. Every pharmacist must be a perfectionist with medications and have a healthy fear of mistakes to ensure that patients are not harmed.

Every pharmacist must also be a leader so pharmacy continues to progress. Managers administer, while leaders innovate, and managers ask how while leaders ask what and why. Managers focus on systems, while leaders focus on people. Managers maintain while leaders develop because managers rely on control while leaders inspire trust. Managers have a short-term perspective; leaders have a

long-term perspective. Managers accept the status quo; leaders challenge the status quo. Managers are "good soldiers," while leaders are their own people; thus, managers are copies and leaders are the original. Nevertheless, every leader must be a manager at times.

The evolution of our pharmacy services from practicing only in the pharmacy department to clinical services has resulted from leadership by both formal leaders—those with titles such as director or coordinator—and also by pharmacists without official leadership titles. Leadership is very different than management in that it is rarely possible to ensure the exact outcome of a change in the way work is organized or processed, so calculated risks must be taken. From the experience gained with the calculated risk, adjustments are made until the desired outcome is achieved.

Leadership skills are learned by observing successful leaders and looking for chances to learn leadership lessons.

Identifying leadership mentors who are pharmacists doing or having done what you would like to do and asking them to assist you are good strategies. Leading from a staff or clinical position entails

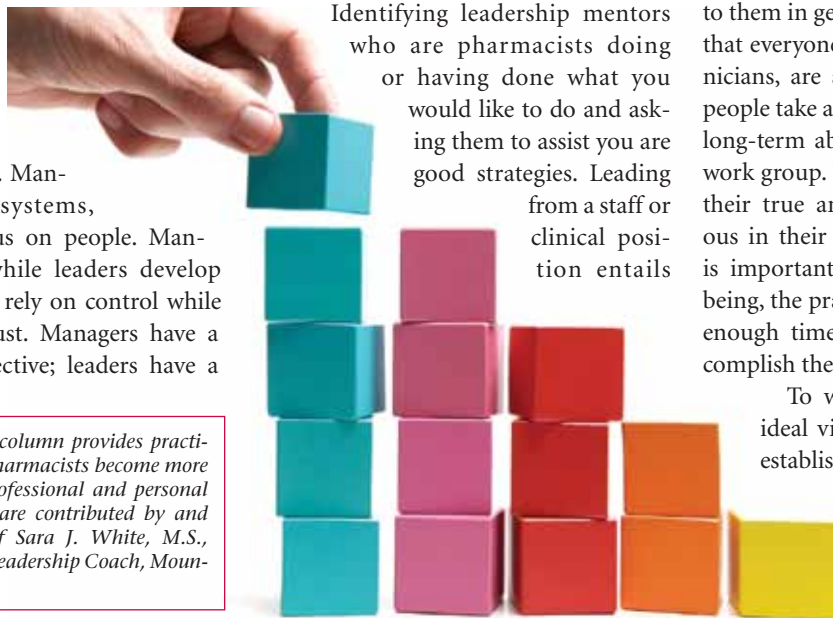
taking responsibility for and pursuing a vision, engaging and inspiring others, cultivating influence throughout an organization, and investing in the future by giving back.

**Taking responsibility for and pursuing a vision.** As a leader, you need to hold yourself accountable for all the things you have control over and ensure that you assist others in the things you don't have total control over. Leaders do not believe that nothing can be done to resolve a particular problem and do not resort to complaining or blaming others. Leaders figure out how to get what they deem important no matter the obstacles.

Pursuing a vision means defining what you and your work group are trying to accomplish now and what the ideal future would be. Ask the following questions of your work group: What are we trying to achieve? In what ways are we trying to achieve it? What major issues do we face? What do others think is good or bad about our work? Are we properly organized? Take the time to have all group members define what is important to them in getting their job done. Be sure that everyone, including pharmacy technicians, are afforded equal input. Have people take a holistic approach and think long-term about the ideal future of the work group. Try to get people to unleash their true ambitions and be adventurous in their ideas. In this discussion, it is important to set aside, for the time being, the practical aspects of not having enough time, people, or money to accomplish these goals.

To work toward achieving this ideal vision, the work group must establish attainable but challenging goals. Write each goal at the top of a page, and sequentially list the

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*The Success Skills column provides practical advice to help pharmacists become more effective in their professional and personal lives. Installments are contributed by and reflect the views of Sara J. White, M.S., FASHP, Pharmacy Leadership Coach, Mountain View, CA.*

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steps that are needed to achieve it. Next, develop a timeline that includes specific dates to achieve each step. Establish reasonable review periods to assess progress toward the vision. Working together toward a shared goal gives people a sense of ownership and responsibility that builds an atmosphere or culture of team spirit where people are willing to help each other get the job done. The established vision provides direction when group members make daily decisions and engages and inspires others.

**Engaging and inspiring others.**

Your success depends more on other people than on your own abilities. Successful people need others who willingly support them. This support is gained by consciously engaging and inspiring others. A key to engaging and inspiring others is to build trust and good working relationships with them, no matter their position. Actively seek their views and opinions by finding out how they spend their personal time, what is important in their life, what they value about their job, and what they think could be improved at work.

Trust—built by being available, being approachable, being consistent, being honest, keeping promises, and being direct and fair with everyone—must be earned. Never have a double standard. Make sure any instructions you give are clear and concise. Someone's "poor performance" may be the result of that person not really understanding what needs to be done. Always assess your potential role in another's performance. This is especially true when training new employees. Allow them to do the task first while you observe, and then you can retrain them as needed.

Always recognize people for their contributions by thanking them, acknowledging their efforts to others, and praising them for extraordinary work. Look for ways to celebrate individual and team contributions. You probably spend more time with your work group than with your family, if you don't count the

time spent sleeping. The people you work with are your second family, so enjoy them and the time together.

You also need to exert leadership in working effectively with your superior. Keep in mind that your superior may be older and thus view things differently. You must first establish some common ground by asking about his or her career and current priorities. When trying to influence your superior, do your homework and make it easy for him or her to agree with your proposal. When you mention a new problem, always have suggestions for solutions. Occasionally you won't agree with your superior, so you need to be able to disagree without being disagreeable. Asserting that people are wrong may make them stop listening to you; if this happens, you lose your ability to influence them. Rather than saying "I disagree," ask questions such as "Have we considered . . . ? Can you bring me up to speed on your thinking? Could you help me better understand . . . ?" Being willing to compromise and only achieve part of what you would like to see happen is still an example of leadership because you can always come back later to achieve the rest of the goal; if you totally walk away, it is very hard to revisit the decision.

Successful engagement of others includes resolving conflicts that would only get worse if left alone. Actively listen to all sides of the conflict and deal with the facts. You must try to preserve your relationship with each person. It may be useful to gather all concerned parties together to express their thinking, because conflict can often arise from misunderstandings. Try to devise a plan that allows all sides to win, because you may lose the trust of someone who is the clear loser in your intervention.

**Cultivating influence throughout an organization.**

Since medications are used throughout your organization, you need to be a pharmacy representative in all your interactions. Think of yourself as representing the interests of not only the pharmacy but also those of the pharmacy's customers (nurses, physicians, patients, and administration) and not favoring one over the other. If someone

complains about pharmacy service, try to see the matter from that person's perspective. For example, if nurses complain about late or missing doses, shadow a nurse for part of a shift as he or she tries to find doses and complete a round of medication administration. Paraphrase the complaint without placing blame. Analyze the situation calmly, and ask questions to be sure you understand and to build trust. Observe both verbal and nonverbal aspects of the conversation, and give the person speaking your full attention. Decide on appropriate immediate action and explain your further planned actions. Let people know the outcome of their input. Your reputation for follow-through is a leadership skill and builds trust in you as a pharmacy ambassador. Do not complain outside of the pharmacy regarding pharmacy matters you would like to see changed. Such conversations should be restricted to inside the pharmacy. Remember that you represent the pharmacy.

**Investing in the future by giving back.**

What do you want your professional legacy to be? Even if you are just beginning practice, this is a critical question for you to consider. A professional legacy is how the people who you work with will remember you when you are gone. Will you be thought of fondly or not missed at all? Do you readily share your experience and expertise, or do you feel others need to "learn the hard way, as you did"? Presenting at professional meetings, publishing, serving as a preceptor to students and residents, and lecturing at colleges of pharmacy or for community groups are investments in the future and demonstrate your leadership. Seek these opportunities by volunteering. Offer to serve on committees of professional organizations or on boards of directors or hold elective office. These opportunities further develop your leadership skills, as you will assist the profession through these activities.

Think about the people who have helped you in your career, and do the same for younger colleagues. A great

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way to give back is to offer to mentor young practitioners or students. When you think about the challenges they are going to experience in their careers, they deserve any head start they can get. Listen to them, affirm their strengths, and be supportive of them. Give people your contact information, and let them know that you would be happy to assist them.

Another way to give back to pharmacy is by continually being a change agent and moving pharmacy services forward. Harness the dissatisfaction or frustration you feel at work and develop new ways to organize and process your tasks, continuing the professional service heritage provided by those before you.

**Conclusion.** Developing leadership skills will make pharmacists more effective and respected in the workplace.

### Suggested readings

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Badaracco JL. Leading quietly. Boston: Harvard Business School; 2001.

Maxwell JC. The 360° leader. Nashville:Nelson; 2006.

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*The author has declared no potential conflicts of interest.*

DOI 10.2146/ajhp080697

Originally published in *Am J Health-Syst Pharm*. 66:2092–2096, © 2009, American Society of Health-System Pharmacists, Inc. All rights reserved. Posted with permission.