

## Enlightened Healthcare Leadership: Foundation of an Extraordinary Workplace Culture

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Are the words *compassion, respect, and integrity* in your organization's mission and/or core values? If so, then these ideals are important, and therefore, reflected throughout the organization. But how do we really permeate a culture with those organizational ideals? An extraordinary workplace culture begins with an enlightened leadership model in which leaders embody the very qualities of the organizational vision and values; not

simply dictate them. Enlightened leaders operate from authenticity and strength of character rather than egos being driven by the need for power and validation. At all levels, great leaders make a critical difference in the workplace culture by replacing fear with trust and compassion. Teamwork, innovation, productivity, and efficiency emerge and thrive in a trusting atmosphere. Valued employees extend compassion and respect to patients, families, and to co-workers. Compassionate service directly influences patient satisfaction and safety, outcomes, reimbursement, and profitability. Conversely, the old model of fear-based leadership results in internal competition and rivalry, blocking genuine cooperation and communication.

Authentic leadership is not defined by an organizational chart. Enlightened leadership is the process in which the spirit within the leader recognizes the same spiritual essence in those he/she leads. This recognition provides a conduit or channel of energy that propels

everyone involved toward the dedication and action necessary to achieve goals. Now, as throughout time, enlightened leaders can be identified by their traits of vision, courage, compassion, integrity, and humility. They make decisions from integrity and respect for others, building loyalty and commitment. Consider these essential steps to enlightened healthcare leadership:

- 1. Look within:** Be courageous and place a fixed eye on your own fears and weaknesses. Deep, honest self-reflection is the most crucial step in restoring and strengthening your inner spiritual greatness. Until you can recognize personal doubts and inadequacies, you will project them onto others. Unacknowledged fear becomes disguised as anger, impatience, grandiosity, or even, self-righteousness. It takes great wisdom and courage to own your imperfections and be accountable for yourself; far easier to blame and even shame others. An unenlightened

physician, for example, can affect patient safety because nurses are afraid to question orders.

2. **Face your enemies:** Recognize the opportunity to learn about yourself when you encounter an enemy. Be brave enough to ask yourself the following: why am I threatened by this person, what am I afraid it says about me, and why am I reacting emotionally to this person or situation? Our enemies are defined by whom or what threatens us. The face of the enemy changes based on our circumstances, whether we are talking about individuals, companies or even nations. So the power resides in us to face the real enemy, our own fearful ego. The person or situation that brings up our inner insecurities is actually a gift. As difficult as it is to realize, our perceived enemies teach us to respond from strength, rather than react in fear.
3. **Acknowledge and appreciate those you lead:** Recognition and appreciation are basic human needs. Focus on others' strengths rather than weaknesses. Consciously give credit and thanks to others, elevating and energizing them. Criticizing

those being led depletes their energy and decreases their self-confidence. Demeaning others is like shooting a hole in the gas tank, draining the fuel that drives the organization, and wondering why we aren't getting better mileage.

4. **Give up the need for external validation.** Great leaders never take credit for others' work and do not need external validation. They accept responsibility and even blame for unexpected consequences. Ego driven leaders, fueled by artificial power and arrogance, like to claim victory, be the star, control others, and appear superior. These behaviors cause insecurity, distrust, anger and doubt in others. Dysfunction, drama, and sabotage erupt, limiting the achievement of organizational goals.
5. **Be open minded and approachable:** Be present and genuinely listen to others by first giving up judgment, pre-conceived ideas and personal biases. Start from a place of equality and respect, regardless of titles or positions within your organization. Invite others to contribute. Be willing to be wrong or to not have all

the answers. If you seek only people who agree with you and who validate your ego the organization is deprived of new ideas and innovation.

As leaders, I challenge you to embody your organizational values by continually and honestly confronting and developing your own inner character. The path to enlightened leadership and an extraordinary workplace culture occurs when we first look within, rather than trying to change others.

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