

The Four Dynamic Qualities of LEADERSHIP FITNESS

By David Chinsky, MBA, DrPH

Successful physician leaders know they must work consistently to maintain a high level of achievement in their lives, their organizations and their world. While outsiders looking in often mistakenly attribute accomplishment to luck, or being in the right place at the right time, successful leaders know better.

In our work developing agile, competent and energetic leaders, we have observed four dynamic qualities of leadership fitness: clarity, confidence, effectiveness and vitality.

Effective leadership begins with establishing and communicating a clear sense of direction. One of the pivotal ingredients of developing followership is painting a palpable vision of the future. The best leaders are able to assess current reality, often with brutal honesty, and are then able to chart a new course for moving entire teams from “where we are today” to “where we need to be.”

Employees Seek Clarity

More than anything else, employees seek clarity from their leaders. Leaders lacking clarity create an environment where staff members are forced to choose among multiple priorities. When employees look to leadership for direction and it is not there, team members begin to wonder whether their leaders are really steering the ship.

While clarity creates a necessary and strong foundation for action, the most successful leaders combine their sense of direction with a powerful self-confidence that amplifies their message. Employees have a keen sense – a sort of radar – when it comes to interpreting what they hear from their leaders. While the words may be logical and understandable, if there is a lack of authenticity the leader’s message has been compromised.

When leaders allow their own doubts to go unresolved, they risk contaminating their own messages with the shadow that lurks behind their words. Successful leaders learn how to overcome the dampening effect of powerful, and negative, influences. They develop strategies to effectively push ahead with conviction and self-assurance, and they have the resiliency and confidence necessary to bring others along with them.

Clear and confident leaders also must be skilled in the core competencies of managing and leading people. Substance and effectiveness do matter. Without the requisite level of sophis-

tics in key management and leadership practices, all of the clarity and confidence in the world will not create the long-term results leaders seek for their teams and organizations.

There are varying degrees of experience and expertise in the areas of communication, team building, conflict resolution, performance management, creating accountable organizations, delegation and execution. Fit leaders develop core strength in each of these key areas.

Integrating Skills for Success

Is the successful integration of clarity, confidence and effectiveness sufficient for leadership fitness? To ensure the achievement of sustainable success and long-term impact, we discovered a fourth and critical quality called vitality. We added vitality to our model after watching too many leaders fail to “go the distance.” We saw repeated instances of frustration, overwhelm, fatigue and burnout. The addition of this fourth quality results in a model of leadership fitness that is both more holistic and dynamic.

Vitality is a measure of our energy, stamina and endurance. It is an important sign of our ability to manage the numerous and competing demands for our time. The risk to leaders of becoming bogged down by the endless stimuli they confront on an almost hourly basis begs for a model of leadership fitness that embraces the proficiency with which leaders handle all of life’s demands.

Vital leaders have increased flexibility and a greater range of motion. Without vitality, it is more difficult to achieve clarity. Mental acuity and physical vitality are linked more than we know. Without vitality, it is less likely that leaders will remain confident. Finally, without vitality, the energy it takes to lead and manage well becomes depleted.

Leaders operating at their prime understand and leverage the dynamic synergies between all four qualities of leadership fitness. They derive power and balance from the inter-relationships that exist between clarity, confidence, effectiveness and vitality. **MM**

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