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Leadership and Coaching in the Healthcare Arena: What You Need to Know

Understanding the Emotional Tools Required to Lead Your Team

In normal praxis, people are promoted to a position of management or leadership due to their effort, results or good performance. They become leaders by default. But when they get there they soon realise that leadership takes something more than reaching goals or showing good intentions. Leadership is about getting others motivated, about the ability to affect human behaviour, while focusing on achieving the mission.

Medical professionals are accustomed to using an analytical approach and bearing responsibility as an innate part of their expertise. Good leadership, however, is not only about being competent in their primary clinical role. It involves a much higher scale of complex skills, both in management and communication. Medical leaders have to be effective and efficient at using each team member's expertise to advance the organisation. In this article I will touch on the core elements needed for effective leadership and coaching.

Analytical Approach

In a healthcare environment, specialists learn by deeply analysing the case and subsequently choosing the most important or most urgent one to solve. In their exam they have to take a closer look at the details underlying the problem. They take a rational and analytical approach and care less about their emotional environment. Focusing on themselves and the problems rather than others involved can lead to confusion, conflicts and a big ego.

Bearing Responsibility

Medical specialists are used to taking a great amount of responsibility and making decisions quickly. Many of these decisions are made without lengthy planning and without consulting others. In some medical specialties interaction within the team is not possible due to a very hierarchical organisation.

Due to keen competition, this phenomenon cannot only be observed within a specialised team, but also within different teams in different kinds of institutions. In this context, professional and personal development of the team members is limited and adversely affects the advancement of the organisation.

Emotional Intelligence

To be successful as a leader, a more insightful understanding of individuals' needs and competencies is needed. One key element of leadership coaching for healthcare leaders is the development of emotional intelligence their ability to process information of an emotional nature and to relate emotional processing to a wider cognition.

Literature describes four types of abilities:

- Perceiving emotions – the ability to detect and decipher emotions in faces, pictures, voices and motions and to identify one's own emotions;
- Using emotions – the ability to harness emotions to facilitate various cognitive activities, such as thinking and problem-solving. Capitalising fully upon changing moods in order to best fit the task at hand;
- Understanding emotions – the ability to comprehend emotional language and to appreciate complicated relationships between emotions. Being sensitive to slight variations between emotions, and the ability to recognise and describe how emotions evolve over time and,
- Managing emotions – the ability to regulate emotions in ourselves and others.

Therefore, the emotionally intelligent person can harness emotions, even negative ones, and manage them to achieve intended goals within a team.

Understanding your own and other people's behaviour well enough will allow you to move yourself and others in the direction of accomplishing goals. It is important for healthcare leaders to develop a sense of awareness where one learns to control emotions, develop a sense of empathy towards others and be outstanding for interpreting and understanding the behaviour of others.

Through insights, leaders and their staff become more motivated to accomplish the mission. Personnel are the greatest assets in healthcare.

How to Improve Emotional Intelligence

How can we improve our emotional intelligence and what are the important aspects to be considered as a team leader? Here a few insights how leadership can be improved within a team with the aim to achieve a defined mission.

How to Harness Emotions

The ability to harness emotions, even negative ones, and manage them to achieve set targets within a team is mainly driven by the unconscious mind. The unconscious mind stores memories, makes associations and learns quickly, organises all your memories and represses memories with unresolved negative emotions for resolutions. It controls and maintains all perceptions.

External events are deleted, distorted and generalised by filters to finally provide an internal representation. Based on our physiology and on our

state, a certain behaviour will be generated. This is common to all human beings.

Being aware of this, leadership requires respect for the other person's model of the world. Resistance in a team member is a sign of lack of rapport and reflects inflexible communication. People are not their behaviours, which mean that there are no unresourceful people, only unresourceful states.

Communicate Within Your Team

For leadership, calibrating one's behaviour is very important, as behaviour is the most important information about a person. It is important to notice and to communicate within your team that everyone is in charge of his own mind and therefore the results he achieves. It is also vital to be aware that they have all the resources they need to succeed and all the potential to achieve their desired outcome. There is no failure, only feedback.

Lead by Example

As a team leader you have to lead by example. Speak of team members and not of employees. You must set the standard for everyone in the team. Team members who do not work accordingly will lower the standard – these are so called pay check people, doing only the minimum without taking responsibility.

In the process of implementing any new strategy, your team must understand each of the different steps – team members can then think ahead and not only deal with the actual situation. Awareness of the right strategy is the glue between the individual and the team to achieve the mission. This is also an important aspect to get leverage for small businesses – ask the team members what will it mean to them to contribute to that mission?

If they do not identify any purpose to the mission, they cannot be said to support it. In my opinion, paycheck people or people who do not fit into the team may have to be excluded from that team. It is not the people you fail to hire, it is the people you fail to fire that jeopardise your mission.

Be a Leader by Asking Questions

You can be a leader by asking your team questions. You must make sure that your team is supported – as a team leader you have to take care of this aspect. What you value most in your team members, you must show in your own behaviour.

The mission must be emotionally compelling and motivating - when the reason to make an extra effort in the team is strong enough, team members will do anything to achieve it.

If a problem is urgent enough, and the motivation is correct, a good leader will find a way to solve even the most difficult problem. At the end of the day it is important that your team knows you are the leader. True leadership is not what happens when you are there, it is what happens when you are not there.

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