

## **Professional Skills: Leadership**

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Trainees may question why they should consider seeking leadership roles. There are a number of motivations, including frustration regarding current leadership, the personal need for ego satisfaction or power, financial considerations, and altruism. Most importantly, leadership offers a sense of personal satisfaction from developing new and better processes and systems, problem solving, and helping others.

When one considers “leadership” in biomedicine, the usual thought is academic administrators, such as department chairs and deans, or business leaders, such as hospital CEOs. However, there are numerous other fulfilling opportunities for leadership in practice and academic medicine (1). Practice groups are typically led by physicians with financial and office management skills. Hospitals offer leadership opportunities for clinician administrators in areas such as staff privileging, quality improvement, utilization review, and patient safety. Leadership skills are critically important for educational leaders, such as course leaders, training program directors, and university or hospital committee chairs. Finally, professional organizations, such as the American Thoracic Society, provide important opportunities for leadership and leadership skill development. Since highly educated, creative professionals frequently hold strong opinions about management issues; biomedical leadership is often likened to “herding cats,” requiring exceptional people-management skills.

Successful leaders at all levels possess important skills. Professional expertise and knowledge of the organization are clearly necessary in order to engender trust and respect. Leaders have the ability to both develop a vision and communicate the vision to the group. Team building is especially important in order to enable all members of the group to contribute to the goal in a meaningful manner. Skills in conflict resolution and negotiation are necessary in leading any group. Finally, depending upon the circumstances, skills in strategic planning and financial management may be needed.

The business management literature provides interesting insights into the characteristics of successful leaders (2). **Emotional Intelligence** is a term used to describe the ability to manage ourselves and our relationships effectively. Studies have shown that the most effective business leaders are those with high scores on the four components of Emotional Intelligence: **Self-Awareness** is understanding of one's own emotions and their impact, the ability to realistically evaluate one's strengths and weaknesses, and self-confidence. **Self-Management** consists of self-control, honesty and integrity, conscientiousness, adaptability, achievement orientation, and initiative to seize opportunities. **Social Awareness** is empathy, organizational awareness, and service orientation to recognize the needs of others. **Social Skill** includes visionary leadership, ability to influence others, propensity to develop skills in others, communication skills, ability to lead others in new directions ("Change Catalyst"), building of interpersonal bonds, and promotion of cooperation and teamwork.

Business management research has also identified management styles that are effective in different settings (2). The most successful leaders use combinations of these styles, depending upon the settings. The **Coercive** leader demands immediate compliance and is most effective in a crisis. An example of appropriate coercive leadership would be the captain of a ship in a storm or the leader of a "Code" team. However, coercive leadership has long-term negative consequences in most settings. **Authoritative** leaders are capable of mobilizing people toward a vision and are most positive when a change in direction is needed. **Affiliative** leadership creates harmony and builds emotional bonds, heals rifts, and gains loyalty. However, exclusive use of this style can lead to tolerance of mediocrity. **Democratic** leadership forges consensus through participation of others in decision making. This style is effective in developing consensus, but takes time and can inhibit forceful decision making. The **Pacesetter** leadership style sets high standards for performance and works best when there is a motivated team. Successful leaders of research teams frequently use the Pacesetter style effectively to achieve results in a timely fashion. However, feedback to team members may falter if this style is used exclusively. The **Coaching** leadership style is very successful in educational settings since it promotes performance in others and builds for the

future. This style works best when the team members believe that they can benefit from improvement!

Leadership training should begin in the early stages of training. Residents and clinical fellows have the opportunity to serve as leaders of complex, multidisciplinary health care teams. Work hour regulations necessitate frequent “hand-offs,” requiring important communication skills. Similarly, postdoctoral fellows in research laboratories can acquire valuable research team leadership skills. Both clinical and research training programs increasingly offer career development training that includes leadership and communication skills.

Career development workshops developed by professional organizations, such as this one offered by the ATS, provide discipline-specific training. Many institutions offer leadership academies (3) that provide training in leadership, communication, and management skills. These academies are in part motivated by the need to develop new leaders who will be needed as the “baby boom” generation retires. Other sources of leadership training are formal, degree-granting programs, such as those offering MBA or MPH degrees. Finally, a number of institutions, such as the Harvard-Macy Institute, offer intensive non-degree courses in management.

Some leaders begin their careers with a plan to attain leadership. Others evolve into leadership positions. Steps to attaining a leadership position include: hard work leading to recognized expertise, setting a leadership goal, developing a plan to attain the goal, focus on achieving the goal, effective mentoring, and reassessment of goals (4). Sometimes it is necessary to change institutions in order to achieve a leadership goal. Good luck helps too....

Women and minorities have special issues in attaining leadership positions. For women, traditional gender roles and different time courses for careers can present problems (5). Minorities and women may also have fewer role models and mentors. For these reasons, professional organizations, such as the ATS, provide valuable opportunities for long-distance mentoring and networking.

In summary, there are myriad opportunities for leadership in the biomedical professions. A variety of leadership skills are needed for successful leadership, and opportunities exist for training in these skills. The rewards of leadership are numerous, but the most important is the sense of “doing good” that brought us into the field at the beginning. The key elements to attaining a leadership position are the desire to do so and effective coaching along the way!

## **References**

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