

## TEN LESSONS FOR PHYSICIAN LEADERS IN INTEGRATED HEALTH SYSTEMS

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Presuming health system consolidation continues apace, there will be expanding demand for physician leaders within the medical enterprise of integrated health systems. The lessons that follow are experienced-based and are intended for the emerging physician leaders and well as the more seasoned. Each is provided to physician leaders for contemplation and each requires thoughtful integration with one's personality and natural tendencies. In other words, the following are offered as "guidelines" for the shaping of one's leadership style and personal expectations for their role as leaders of healthy cultures in complex organizations.

1. "Don't fall in love with decision making, your 'world' will get smaller at an accelerating rate". Practicing physicians are accustomed to making decisions for patients at a dizzying pace. They are also accustomed to people coming to them for decisions of consequence; perhaps hundreds a day. Decisions of leadership require a very different tempo and context of perspective. There are instances when emerging physician leaders, especially, fall prey to those around them coming to them for their "wisdom and decisiveness". Beware the trap! The more decisions you make for others the fewer they need to make for themselves. Your world of leadership can quickly be reduced to doing the work (and taking the risks) of others.
2. "Your job is the fewer, larger decisions that require process, inclusion, careful examination, thoughtfulness and the sharing of accountability". This is related to number 1 above. Save your energy for the decisions that matter. We once told a physician CEO that his job, over the next year, was the five decisions that were most important to the organization. He asked what they were. We told him it was his to discern.
3. Your job is the welfare of the whole; you are not a "shop steward". Physician leaders will, at times, believe their principal role is to protect "the team". This is often the case in emerging integrated health systems where the roles of physician leaders are not well developed. In such cases, physician leaders must learn to walk a fine line between the good of the medical enterprise, within the integrated health system, and the wellbeing of the system overall.
4. "You will never fail by spending too much time on the culture of the organization." Culture is an irrepressible force in organizations that can operate for good or ill. It is real and tangible. It can be decided, designed, deployed and directed. All organizations have a culture whether by design or default and the people of the organization hold leaders responsible for the culture. Newly minted physician leaders can't go wrong with a fair and honest assessment of the culture of the pieces and parts of the organization they serve. To do so provides a basis for the work ahead.
5. "Don't excuse or tolerate bad behavior of peers". A first test of physician leaders is often how they handle the bad behavior of a peer; especially "the one" who is known for "being special". Now, there may not be the need for a public hanging (although at times there is) it is important to remember that a leader's role is to safeguard the organization from risk. Bad behavior puts organizations at risk in innumerable ways. And, the organization is always watching to see how leaders tolerate the behaviors of those in the organization; especially peers.
6. "Be perceived as being unflappable". Nothing is seen as being "more leader-like" than one who is slow to react and rarely, if ever over-reacts. A useful lesson is often learned the hard way; "nothing is ever as good as it seems or as bad as it seems" unless it's life or death. A mark of effective leaders is "keeping one's head when those around you are losing theirs".
7. "Do not fear vulnerability or fallibility". No one expects leaders to be perfect or right all the time. In fact, leaders will find that to show a little vulnerability and fallibility will cause those around to rally to the leader with assistance which, in turn, will help them with their leadership development.
8. "Listen more than you talk". While this should be obvious, there are physician leaders who believe that what they say is far more important than what anyone else can say. The numbers in this category are fortunately few, but they are out there. No one is ever critical of a "good listener".
9. "Let people fail, so long as the costs are affordable". Failure breeds development of those around. Allowing people to fail responsibly and with grace, shows that a leader is genuinely interested in the development of others and it enhances the self awareness and sense of accountability of those permitted to fail.
10. "Know what it means to win". Physician leaders need a firm grasp on the goals and objectives that matter to their organization and those that follow need to know the leaders knows and cares. Leaders need to know what it means "to win". At the end of the day leaders, ideally, lead people and organizations to success. Instilling accountability for success is the job of leaders. Respect comes to leaders who have a firm grasp of what it means for their organization to be a high performer and holds all to expected standards of excellence.

So, while the above may not be novel to seasoned physician leaders, or even would-be physician leaders, for that matter, the lessons cited were, for some, learned the hard way and are offered here to assist others with their leadership development of their personal leadership plan.



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