INSIGHT:

Leadership Development: It’s a Practice Not a Goal
(Part one of a two-part series)

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Jim is a very good nurse. He has shown his skills over and over, and now he has the opportunity to be the nurse manager. The decision is made on a Friday. He starts Monday. What is his preparation to be the nurse manager? The weekend to think about it.

Haley is newer to her role as a leader (about 2 years), but Scott, the CFO, thinks she has the potential to be a VP one day. How does he prepare her for the next level? What gaps are there in her leadership that need to be filled?

Jim and Haley are just two examples of common healthcare leadership scenarios. Staff members who are adept at their jobs are promoted to leadership roles without a plan for proper training and development of leadership skills. In this two part message, we will walk through the WHY of Leader Development and the HOW of implementing the best leader development practice. I also want to talk about how to set up leaders for success.

Leadership development should be an intentional effort to provide leaders with the opportunity to learn, grow and change. The goal is to produce individuals with the skills to function effectively in an ever-changing environment. Simply put, leadership development is the expansion of the capabilities to be effective in a leadership role. Gaining leadership skills also makes you more apt to make better decisions, and in doing so exercising your critical thinking.

On August 28, 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. approached the podium near the Lincoln Memorial. He came to a line during that speech that wasn’t quite the right one. Off to the side, the singer Mahalia Jackson shouted to Dr King, “Tell them about the dream, Martin!” King paused, looked out over the crowd, and went off-script, saying, “I say to you today, my friends, even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream.” The rest went down in history as one of the most memorable phrases and speeches ever delivered. Leader development is about having the ability to make a decision, knowing the consequences of it, and being able to do that, sometimes, in a split second. It requires critical thinking.

Unfortunately, a lot of leader development is simplified into just training. We end up teaching people things, but not building better leaders. Training is not enough. It’s about teaching critical thinking. Successful leader development should be an ongoing platform that not only teaches what to know but how to apply it.

Leader development is a practice not a goal. That’s why Studer Group’s most tenured partners still host quarterly Leadership Development Institutes (LDIs) more than 10 years after beginning the practice. Southwest Medical Center in Liberal, Kansas hosts two full days of training every quarter. In their (almost) 4 years of partnership with the Studer Group, the leaders there are coming up on their 16th LDI which equates to 256 hours of development. In the case of Western Missouri Medical Center (Warrensburg, MO) the leaders do a one-day, quarterly LDI supplemented by monthly Lunch and Learn events. By the way, both organizations won the Studer Group Healthcare Organization of the Month Award in 2014.

Leader development should not only cultivate the leader, but should also advance the organization. It should focus on growth, performance, emotional intelligence and should help leaders be innovative. It is about intentional communication and creating an intentional culture. If we can grow leaders, we can then change organizations, and we can transform healthcare. It starts with leader development.

In Studer Group’s Evidence-Based Leadership℠ (EBL) model we follow a simple flow: align goals, align behaviors, and then, align processes. And under that first step – aligned goals – leadership development is front and center. Part two in this series will examine the HOW of leadership development by sharing the characteristics of an effective leadership training program.