

Physician and Scientist Leadership in Academic Medicine: Strategic Planning for a Successful Academic Leadership Career

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In medical school and during the residency and fellowship training periods, the focus of the educational process centers appropriately on health, illness, and the disease process. This is the time period where skills are developed and honed to provide exemplary care of the patient as well as the development of research interests and proficiency. Once the training period has been completed, the physician enters into the practice of medicine where not only clinical or research skills are required, but an increasing level of leadership is also fundamental. Yet, during the training period, little if any formal education includes preparation for a leadership position.

Most successful academic leaders have nurtured a career pathway that allowed them the opportunity to be selected for leadership positions. Hard work, diligence, and recognition for either clinical or research expertise enhances career options for academic leadership. Six basic principles have been adapted for the strategic planning for a successful and effective leadership career in academic medicine. They include (1) develop a vision, (2) cultivate a plan, (3) focus, (4) seek counsel, (5) periodically reassess, and (6) enjoy the journey.

KEY WORDS: academic medicine, leadership, mentorship

STATE OF AFFAIRS

Dr. Anne Carmen has been a faculty member for 5 years. She joined the academic staff immediately after completing her fellowship in transplant surgery. She is very talented, has excellent clinical skills and interpersonal skills, has an inquisitive mind, is productive in her research projects, and is ambitious. She is, by all reports, a "rising star." The chief of her division has unexpectedly retired, and she is offered the position as the new division chief. Although she is sincerely honored at being offered the position, she is concerned that she has been in aca-

demics for only 5 years and that she has held no previous administrative positions. Her leadership experience is limited to managing her research laboratory, for which she has extramural funding. She wants to know what she needs to do to prepare herself for this new role, which she wants to accept.

RESPONSE

Leadership courses are not offered in most medical academic institutions, even though they are quite common in the business world. Dr. Carmen is very astute in seeking assistance to prepare herself for this new role. One of the first things she should do is to talk to the current division chief about the situation of the division. She should be aware of all of the problems, the finances, and support that have been provided to the current chief. She should ask for help in how to bargain for the best package to run this division. She should also carefully assess her own career goals to be certain that this position is appropriate for her. Next she should assess her strengths and weaknesses as a leader. Although she may feel that she has not had previous leadership experience, in reality, she has had much experience, but on a different level than what she may recognize. She should assess how she interacts with her peers, the operating room team, and the office team. She should reflect on how effective she is at division, department, and medical school or hospital meetings in having her ideas accepted by the groups. She should review her financial skills to be certain that she is not only familiar with hospital economics, but that she also is fluent in such issues as insurance reimbursements, salary, benefits, and other monetary issues that are critical to the successful division. She should also assess what experts are available to help her and what resources are at her disposal. She should learn to play to her strengths and improve those areas where she feels that she has gaps in her skills. A formal leadership course may help her further hone her skills to increase her chances at success.

It does not have to be a difficult process to develop the skills necessary to become a leader in academic medicine. But for most people, it does take some forethought and planning. The

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most important role of a leader is to achieve results. Just as it takes planning to obtain results, it also requires planning to assume leadership responsibility and to be effective.

The first step is to *develop a vision* of the type of leadership role to which you aspire. This includes a critical evaluation of yourself, including your personal and professional skills, and what type of leadership skills you possess. Emotional intelligence is described as the ability to manage our relationships and ourselves effectively.¹ It consists of 4 fundamental capabilities: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and social skill. Self-awareness includes a realistic evaluation of your strengths and weaknesses, an assessment of your self-confidence, and the ability to understand your emotions as well as recognize their impact on others. Self-management includes self-control, a consistent display of honesty and integrity, the ability to adapt, and a readiness to seize opportunities. Social awareness includes empathy toward others and the ability to read the organization, to build networks, and to navigate the politics. Social skills include the ability to take charge and inspire others with a compelling vision, the ability to listen and send a clear, convincing message, proficiency in initiating new directions, and competency at building teamwork and collaborations. In preparing for a leadership career, it is important to recognize your personal traits, enhance those that are positive, and improve those that may be detracting.

There are 6 types of leadership styles with variable impact on the climate or working atmosphere.¹ These styles include *coercive leadership*, demands immediate compliance and has the least overall positive impact; *authoritative leadership*, mobilizes individuals toward a vision and has a very positive effect; *affiliative leadership*, creates emotional bonds and harmony and has a positive impact on the workplace; *democratic leadership*, builds consensus through participation and is highly rewarding; *pacesetter leadership*, expects excellence and self-direction from colleagues, sets high standards for performance, but has an overall negative impact on the workplace; and *coaching leadership*, develops other people for future roles and is correlated with a positive impact on the workplace climate. The best leadership style, or the one that produces the most positive results, is one that can adapt to the current situation seamlessly. Most successful leaders are able to shift through several if not all of these leadership styles. Assess your strengths and shortcomings and evaluate which category of leadership best fits your own style.

It is important to investigate the career options available to you early in your career. Depending on the demands of the profession and your own background, you should decide if you are best suited to pursue a leadership career in clinical medicine, research, or hold a key administrative role. Understand what is expected in that particular leadership position of interest to you and decide if you are willing or able to meet those expectations. It is equally important to establish reasonable and attainable goals for yourself.

The next step is to *cultivate a plan*. Identify and implement the necessary actions that are obligatory to achieve your leadership goal. Be committed to your plan. Develop the skill sets that

are required to become a leader. Essential skills for a successful academic leader include personal skills: team-building skills, a persuasive communication style, conflict resolution skills, negotiation skills, interviewing skills; strategic and tactical planning skills; financial management skills; expertise in your profession; and knowledge of the organization.^{2,3}

Just as training and preparation are critical to a successful career in medicine and research, training and preparation are as equally important to the development of the physician as an academic leader. One should attend 1 of several leadership courses that are offered nationally or locally for physicians and scientists. Training can play a significant role in leadership development when it focuses on fostering conceptual ability, teachable interpersonal skills, and personal growth.⁴ Modeled after industry, several academic health centers are developing their own leadership programs. The value of internal leadership programs has been documented.⁴

At the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, the Center for Faculty Development sponsored a 1-day Junior Faculty Leadership Development Course that was pilot tested in 2002. It will now be offered to BIDMC and Caregroup faculty on an annual basis. This course is designed for the clinical and research faculty with no past formal leadership training but with leadership aspirations. It emphasizes the key areas of development of personal skills, understanding the basic principles of academic and hospital financial management and the leadership opportunities available in academic medicine, including research, teaching, and administrative roles. Courses such as this one serve to initiate the process of formal training in developing effective leadership skills.

Visibility is an important component of a plan for acquisition of a leadership position. Accept or volunteer for appointments and assignments that will improve your knowledge base and skills, including local, regional, and national opportunities. In a brief survey administered to Caregroup division chiefs and department chairs on management training for the Junior Faculty Leadership Development Course to be offered in October 2003, recommendations to future academic leaders to become effective leaders included accepting responsibilities at the department or division level, being informed about institutional politics, becoming an expert in one's field, having a vision of what you want to accomplish, and building a team, developing a niche, engaging in self-directed reading, and supervising people, managing money, and developing programs.⁵

Perhaps the most difficult of steps is to *focus* on your academic leadership career goals. Evaluate all opportunities and prioritize as to those that may assist in your leadership career goal development. Some new assignments may be simply enjoyable and have value from that point of view. Others may be too time consuming and detract from your goals. With any opportunity accepted, strive to excel in that position. If you cannot devote the time needed to perform appropriately or if it is too far removed from your career goals or if it does not offer personal or professional satisfaction, and if it is optional, do not accept the position. It is worse to perform a responsibility

poorly than never to have the opportunity offered. Some requested responsibilities might be for the ultimate good of the division or department, and be flexible in time of need. Although it is important to focus on your own career goals and needs, it is also important to be viewed as a team player. Opportunities may arise in the future from participation in essential institutional activities. Strive to maintain balance.

One of the most important aspects for a successful career in general and certainly for a leadership role is to seek advice or *counsel* from a trusted senior colleague. A mentor is an invaluable resource to a junior faculty member deciding on a career course. The mentor can serve as an impartial advisor and help establish short-term and long-term goals. A mentor may also facilitate introductions to individuals or organizations that may serve beneficial to a leadership career. It is also important to develop support systems within your own department and institution. Discuss your leadership goals with your department chair or division chief, if acceptable, so that they are aware of your interests. They may be able to assist you in achieving your goals by recommending you to serve on key committees within the department or institution or to serve on national specialty committees. Listen carefully to all advice, and then decide what is best for you.

At regular intervals, take the time to *reassess* your leadership goals and aspirations. Evaluate what you have accomplished to date, what you had expected to accomplish, and what you hope to accomplish in the future. Ask yourself if you are on the right track, if any adjustments are necessary, and if this is the goal you still desire. Review both positive and negative experiences. There is as much to be learned about something that did not go as well as planned as there is to assessing a successful endeavor.

As academic medicine continues to change, leadership goals may also change. As necessary, implement the essential changes to meet your goals. Sacrifices are required of most people in academic leadership positions; decide if the sacrifices are offset by the rewards.

The pathway of developing and achieving a career as a leader in academic medicine should be as rewarding as the goal itself. *Enjoy* the process of developing a leadership career and the career itself. You will be a more effective leader if you follow a pathway that is successful, rewarding, and enjoyable to you. And, remember, to be a leader, you must have followers.

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