

# Leadership & The Human Element

By Lorraine Rinker — July 2005

If you want to make slow, evolutionary change, you need to change your behavior. If you want to make dramatic, revolutionary change, you need to change your paradigm, or the way you view reality. The explosive growth in today's health care industry has medical professionals, politicians, and health care consumers debating over the need for radical change to handle increasing demand without diminishing the quality of care. Huge issue, and it won't be solved here -- so let's break the issue down into something we can all relate to and think in terms of a single element -- the human element.

The Institute of Medicine reported that "the importance of the team, and of effective collaboration and communication among team members" was a theme mentioned repeatedly during its 2002 conference as a vital component in designing new models of care. The "importance of the team" holds true today; building and implementing effective teams continues to be vital to health care's response to the "imperatives of life and death". Going a few steps further, building "high-performance" teams is a rarity in most industries but an imperative in the health care industry.

Effective teamwork doesn't just happen – building effective teams requires thought and practice. Much of that thought process involves the selection of complementary skills and a balance between the roles of leadership and management. This holds true in building high-performance teams but, with the added distinction of its members possessing strong interpersonal commitment as if to proclaim "if one of us fails, we all fail".

People continue to interchange the terms "leadership" and "management", yet these are two distinctive and complementary systems of action, each with its own purpose and characteristic activities. Both are necessary for success in today's increasingly complex and growth-oriented business environment. After spending more than 12 years in health care leadership roles, I define leadership as a "relationship" (coping with change) and management as a "function" (coping with complexity). Having worked for organizations that knowingly differentiate between leadership and management, and those that do not, I find the former is able to *effectively* achieve above-average growth in a highly competitive market. The latter is less able to fully realize the potential of its people, therefore, continues to struggle in its competitive market; over-spending, under-achieving, and eventually spinning out of control.

Changing your leadership/management paradigm means changing your understanding of the difference between the two. Knowing the difference between leadership and management is one thing, understanding the value of balance between the two is another. Most of us are familiar with the formal leadership role such as that of an organization's CEO. But there is also an intricate informal leadership and management model at the most tactical levels within the organization. Consider for instance, Pierre Turquet's excellent example of leadership in a surgical team:

*"In an operative team, under normal conditions the surgeon is probably in charge. If, however, respiratory embarrassment occurs, the anesthetist may take over while the surgeon packs the operating site and perhaps acts as assistant to the anesthetist. When the respiratory crisis is over, the surgeon will again assume the leadership role and continue his operation."*

In this example, the team works effectively as a high-performance team because of 1) a tactical balance between leadership and management, and 2) a rotation of roles without impasse or conflict. Its not that the surgeon disappeared from the operating room so the anesthetist could

take over, but it was an exchange of roles. Such teams are more likely to share leadership roles within the team and see the task beyond what an individual can accomplish alone.

Learning to build effective teams, and in particular high-performance teams, improves your ability to implement dramatic change with positive results. It's all about the people – more specifically it's all about the right combination of people and a balance of leadership and management roles. Effective teams need to exist at all levels of the health care organization – formal and informal leaders must be empowered to effect change – and it all begins with the human element – the right person in the right role at the right time.

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