Executive Summary

- Many new leaders believe that the way to get things done is to be autocratic and directive.
- Successful leadership is a negotiated process with the employees that must be mutually satisfying for the evolution into a high-performing unit or organization.
- Well-intentioned leaders often overlook the very simple truth of learning to help people move forward in their work and to treat people as decent human beings.

It is not uncommon for new leaders, after a few months in a new position, to be confronted with the reality that the people they are supposed to be leading are not following. There can be many root causes for this dilemma. It is important to explore the issue immediately to change direction quickly. Unfortunately in health care, many people are promoted to leadership positions without the experience, educational background, or on-the-job education in leadership that would help them to be immediately successful. Therefore, the new leader must develop a way to drill into issues as they arise and to analyze how they can find better ways of leading and managing.

One common issue is the notion among new leaders that they must be directive and tell employees what to do. Many new leaders believe that the way to get things done is to be autocratic and directive. The fear of failure on the part of the leader can create a sense of urgency to make a difference quickly in order to be judged successful as soon as possible in this new role. Thinking that the staff works for the leader rather than the leader working for the staff is a common mental model for new leaders. They believe that if they exercise their “formal authority,” they can accomplish great things. New leaders don’t have many leadership tools in their toolkit because of their lack of experience. So the easiest one to throw down is the authority card and insist that people follow orders. However, this approach fails in the long run.

Mutual Satisfaction

Knowledge workers want to be valued for their mind and ability to contribute to plans and projects rather than be treated as a technical person who can only follow orders. Successful leadership is a negotiated process with the employees that must be mutually satisfying for the evolution into a high-performing unit or organization. Without that mutuality, the staff will soon feel exploited which quickly squelches the spirit and leads to a disengaged staff.

Adams and Goldsmith (2004) introduce the concept of “question thinking” as a way of learning more about the people and the situations around you. These authors describe how we can change from subjective “judgers” to objective “learners” by using this “Question Thinking” method to move everyone to become inquiring people and leaders. In other words, the way to change the world is to change ourselves first.

Unless we know our staff, we will be unable to interact with them on a level of productivity and caring. No one wants to come to work believing they are an expendable widget in a massive machine that lacks feeling and caring. Positive feedback certainly helps, but Amabile and Kramer (2007) report that the two most important behaviors a leader or manager can exhibit are (a) to help people move forward in their work and (b) to treat them as decent human beings. This formula seems simple, but these authors go on to say that if we don’t know the inner work lives of our people and if we don’t appreciate how important factors — perception, emotion, and motivation — influence their daily lives, we will miss the mark in working with our people. How else will we know where people are with their perceptions, emotions, and motivation unless we can query and get feedback about how we are influencing these three very important inner workings of people and their work life?

The Servant Leader

Well-intentioned leaders, however, often overlook the very simple truth of learning to help people move forward in their work and treating people as decent human beings. Hayward (2007) notes that striving, achieving leaders and managers often show
four faults that can lead to leadership failure: (a) excessive pride and boastfulness, (b) failure to listen to people who are warning you that you are wrong, (c) failing to get feedback about the outcome of your programs, and (d) not planning for problems in advance.

According to Amabile and Kramer (2007), the great management guru, Peter Drucker, once wrote, “So much of what we call management consists of making it difficult for people to do work” (p. 83). They also point out that there is a wealth of management opportunities for leaders to facilitate progress which enhances the inner work lives of people and accelerates progress. Leaders can facilitate this by learning to lead by questioning and knowing our people well. These authors also note that the time people spend at work is increasing and taking up an even greater proportion of our lives. And that simply, people deserve happiness.

Summary
The concept of the “servant leader” was promulgated by Robert Greenleaf almost 30 years ago and is as relevant now as it was then. Many leadership/management concepts are nothing more than the simple precepts of learning to serve your people first in order that they may serve their customers better because they are skilled and fulfilled human beings. When new leaders (and for that matter, experienced leaders) believe that they can be effective by directing, controlling, and putting their needs first, they brew a recipe for a leadership disaster. It only makes sense to give up bossing for serving.

REFERENCES

New Products Available from ANNA

ANNA has released two new educational products. The new products are in CD-ROM format and offer continuing education (CE) credit.

K/DOQI Use in Cardiovascular Disease and Vascular Access
This CD-ROM contains two sessions. Session I is a recorded audio conference from the Fall 2005 ANNA Audio Conference (2.0 CEs), and Session II is a recorded audio conference from the Winter 2007 ANNA Audio Conference (1.5 CEs). The CD-ROM contains the live recordings of the educational sessions and the accompanying presentation materials. If you were not able to participate in these live ANNA offerings, you can complete these CE activities for CE credit. (CE credits available: 3.5. Expires 8/1/09.)

Certification Review
This CD-ROM contains the live recordings of the Certification Review Course and the accompanying presentation materials from ANNA’s 2007 National Symposium in Dallas, TX. The major topic areas addressed are chronic kidney disease, hemodialysis peritoneal dialysis, transplant, and test taking tips. CE credits are available for those who were not available to participate in these live ANNA offerings.

The purchase price of this CD-ROM includes one complimentary evaluation processing for CE credit. Please note that this CD-ROM is for independent study use only and cannot be used to host a live CE event. (CE credits available: 5.25. Expires 5/1/09.)