

ARKANSAS HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION

Five Powerful Actions

You Can Become a Changing Force in Your Healthcare System

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Making real change seems a formidable challenge, but the only limitation is in the way we think. That's right...the answers to positive change lie within each of us and center on the way we think about behaviors, attitudes and the corporate roles we play.

We can all point to poor communication (from others), lack of candor (in others), dishonesty (in others), and turf battles (fought by others) as the root causes of most problems faced by hospitals today. But what if we turn the tables and start to look within ourselves for the forces that will produce positive change?

Chances are you want to make a difference but don't believe you have the resources to create real results. As a hospital administrator, department chairman, clinical director, or physician leader, you may believe there is something "out there" that will help you make the right choices and have a significant impact. I'm here to tell you, you already have what it takes—if you're willing to make some personal changes.

These five actions, taken on a personal level, are guaranteed to create radical positive change in your healthcare setting. But remember—to change your healthcare center, you must first change yourself.

ACTION 1: LEARN ON THE RUN

Effective medical care comes from taking in signs, symptoms, lab results and diagnostic studies, then combining them to arrive at an accurate diagnosis and treatment plan. Unfortunately, many of us do not apply these same skills to the rest of our jobs. We stay attached to our patterns in spite of indisputable evidence that what we're doing isn't working. We even defend what doesn't work, because it's comfortable.

Learning on the Run is based on "taking in" all available data, then "diagnosing" the problem before acting. Become willing to drop your defenses, take in all the feedback you can gather and *then* assess the situation. Don't allow yourself to become defensive, respond from habit or act based on stale relationship patterns. Open yourself up to learning—looking at the situation with fresh eyes, from new viewpoints.

Here are specific behaviors to help you measure your openness to Learning on the Run, and to assess whether you are more Defensive or Willing to Learn:

SHIFTING FROM DEFENSIVENESS TO LEARNING

High Openness to Learning

- +5 Implement, plan next steps, lay out a timeline, request support, and follow-up.
- +4 Think out loud, making new associations about the issue.
- +3 Request information and examples about the issue in an effort to resolve the problem, not justify it.
- +2 Openly wonder about your role in creating the issue.
- +1 Show you listened by summarizing the key points without interjecting your own thoughts.

THE KEY MOVE: CHOOSE LEARNING OVER DEFENDING

- 1 Show polite interest, while inwardly preparing your rebuttal.
- 2 Justify and excuse the situation by providing a "logical" reason for the problem.
- 3 Make snippy replies and nonverbally show your irritation.
- 4 Complain about decisions and criticize people who aren't present.
- 5 Comply with no intention of actually doing what you say you'll do.

Low Openness to Learning

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ACTION 2: DROP THE ROLES THAT BIND YOU

Most stress and upset in healthcare settings result from our tendency to get stuck in the drama of the moment and inauthentic patterns of behavior. Authenticity—congruence between your inner state of being and your outer behaviors and actions—makes you a high-integrity player, regardless of title, position or identity.

Ask yourself: Do our roles guide our behavior, or do issues drive our behavior?

These role-driven behaviors may sound familiar:

The Chief of Medicine has a predictable "intellectualizing" and "astute diagnostician" style of communicating, and is very defensive.

The Chairman of Family Practice has a long-suffering and martyr-like identity.

And Surgeons—well, they act like surgeons!

One of my favorite moments of authenticity occurred a few years ago during a highly charged Medical Executive Committee meeting at a major medical center. A very dominating, charismatic and extremely influential Chief of Cardiac Surgery known to be "surgical" even when outside the operating room, jumped to his feet still dressed in surgical garb. He bellowed, "Dr. High and Mighty Heart Surgeon is about to show up and I can't stop him!"

The entire group took a collective breath and broke out in relieved laughter. Needless to say, the drama that had previously played many times was averted and energy was freed to deal with other issues and problems.

Now, how is your authenticity? Does your role bind you? If so, let it go.

ACTION 3: TAKE RESPONSIBILITY (BE ACCOUNTABLE)

Too many people seem to feel more responsible for *explaining* their results, or lack of results, than for *achieving* them.

Accountable individuals, on the other hand, make solid agreements and take 100% responsibility for their experiences and commitments. They look inside themselves, wondering about their contribution to problems, rather than lashing out and making them somebody else's fault. They communicate frequently with updates, they're reliable on tight deadlines, and they rarely drop the ball or manipulate reality to stand solo in the spotlight. If they must change an agreement, they promptly alert those who will be affected and renegotiate the agreement.

You must be willing to ask yourself what part your attitude, words or behaviors play in interactions.

When I was asked to help the Board of a major healthcare organization improve the quality and effectiveness of their meetings and planning sessions, I observed Board members'

discussions, breakout groups and activities during recesses and social activities. I later reported on my observations, calling these physicians on their hallway conversations, gossiping, politicizing, and criticizing of people who weren't around. You know the general themes: "Ain't it awful?" "There's nothing we can do." "It's not our fault."

Although I enjoyed a close relationship with the group, their response to my observations was one of deafening silence. I waited, with "tar and feather" fantasies of humiliation parading through my mind.

Finally, a doctor known both as a firebrand and as a respected Board member stood. "I'm choking on these words, but I have to say I'm a gossip." He then proceeded to confess *to their faces* what he had said about these people behind their backs. As he owned his behavior and committed to speaking up more in meetings, he created the opening for many other people to do likewise. It became a radically responsible meeting with unforgettable breakthroughs.

You can encourage personal accountability by asking yourself these questions:

What is it about my attitude or behavior that keeps this going?

Is there anything I'd like to communicate, but haven't?

Have I broken or missed any agreements?

What can I learn from this situation?

ACTION 4: TELL THE TRUTH

Just as in today's corporate world, hospital workers suffer from epidemic levels of lying. About 95% of the time, we lie or manipulate the truth because we want to control the uncontrollable: others' reactions or emotions. We actually believe that the truth is not good for people and that we are protecting them by withholding or shading what's real.

This is wrong and it slows your facility down! Truth instantly gets all the information on the table so everyone involved can quickly make informed decisions with the benefit of all details and opinions. True power and enormous speed are the results when people deal directly with the truth, and with one another.

Much of the exhaustion and burnout of our medical lives comes from the energy expenditure of not telling the truth. The host of reasons generally falls into one of three categories: not facing a feeling, not communicating an experience, or not keeping an agreement. As soon as you face these energy-eaters, you'll fast-forward your healthcare interactions into far greater ease and speed.

Perhaps you've done something you feel guilty about and you haven't come clean with the other person. You may feel angry with someone or hurt about something someone has said, and you haven't told the person directly. If you don't

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communicate the truth directly, your inner self will keep reminding you with random flashes and thoughts, eating valuable time and energy from your day.

Perhaps you didn't follow through on a commitment. Such "integrity slips" tend to drag our energy down. All we have to do to get back to a highly productive state is to handle the broken agreement through some kind of direct communication. Tell the truth.

Is there someone with whom you need to communicate? Is there something you've left undone? What will actually heal and resolve this particular issue? Each time we're willing to tell a hard truth, we become lighter, faster, a positive force for change.

ACTION 5: AWAKEN YOUR SLEEPING GIANT

Does your organization focus time and energy on improving staff *weaknesses*, or capitalizing on staff members' *talents and strengths*?

Truly successful people get "good enough" at basic skills, but optimize their natural gifts, their areas of genius. They also recognize where they don't need to be a genius and delegate those areas to others. When your staff members are allowed to align their purpose and genius with their jobs, your health center's efficiency, productivity, satisfaction and joy will skyrocket.

In healthcare, we constantly ask ourselves to set aside gifts and passions to do "what needs to be done." Instead, let's bring our gifts to the challenges at hand and thrive and expand as a result.

CAN IT BE THIS SIMPLE?

GENIUS ZONES:

Identify which of your skills and abilities belong in each category:

EXCELLENT

- What do you consistently get positive feedback about in your work?
- What do you do better than just about anyone else?

GENIUS

- What work do you so love doing that it doesn't seem like work?
- What parts of your work generate the highest ratio of positive results compared to time spent?

MEDIOCRE

- What do you consistently get negative feedback about in your work?
- What work do you do that just about everyone can do better?

COMPETENT

- What work do you do that others can do just as well or better?
- What work do you do well but doesn't feel totally satisfying?

Our combined "healthcare voices" scream that the problems we face today are bigger and more complex than these five actions suggest. Because we doubt the effectiveness of simple solutions and strategies, we continue old, unproductive patterns of indirectness, defensiveness, blame and inadequate communication. But these don't work.

Today in medical therapeutics we are able to abandon old therapies and technologies in favor of those that work. To gain true power for positive change in our organizations, we must be willing to abandon personal behaviors and attitudes in favor of new ones that work.

Adopting these five actions has completely transformed my life and the lives of thousands of clients. They're yours, now. Your choice is a personal one. Take action and realize your dreams. Your next decision determines your healthcare facility's future.

Contact info@worthethic.com or refer to www.worthethic.com for more information.

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Kate, a widely recognized executive coach, speaker and author, founded Worth Ethic Corporation in 1988. Her BS in engineering and PhD in psychology give her a unique approach when working with analytical, data-oriented executives, who want to expand their emotional intelligence and create company cultures where people perform at their peak. Kate has worked with over 1,000 senior executives in a wide range of industries. She has coached executives globally on all major continents.

Previously, she was vice president of human resources for a high-tech Silicon Valley company. Her books include *The Worth Ethic*, *Earn What You're Worth*, *The Corporate Mystic* (now in its 11th printing).



Eddie Erlandson coaches executives to transform entrenched leadership habits, especially leaders who need to make their style more inspiring or more trustworthy. As an accomplished physician, Eddie draws on his knowledge of the physiological aspects of change, he's also developed a strategies from competing in endurance sports that he applies to leadership. He's worked with executive teams across a number of industries, including consumer products, education, government, high tech, heavy industrial, medical care, pharmaceutical, and the military.

Previously, Eddie served as Chief of Staff at St. Joseph Mercy Hospital in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where he also practiced as a vascular surgeon for over 20 years and co-directed a wellness program.

Eddie Erlandson and Kate Ludeman consult both individually and together, and have co-authored *Alpha Male Syndrome* (2006) and *Radical Change, Radical Results* (2003). They live and work in Austin, Texas.



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