

Time to Lead

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Presenters from AHIMA's 2011 Leadership Academy share their perspectives on what it takes to lead in the current changing healthcare environment.

In the midst of the myriad changes occurring in healthcare today, it is easy to get lost and become a follower. However, ARRA, HITECH, and ICD-10 all require HIM professionals take a leadership role as each involves changing the way organizations develop, manage, and maintain information and information systems.

Here the presenters from AHIMA's 2011 Leadership Academy share their perspectives on what it takes to lead in the current environment.

The Basic Principles of Leadership

By Barbara Fuller, JD, RHIA, FAHIMA

Good leadership-we know it when we see it, and we all know individuals who exemplify what we personally consider good leadership. But what sets these individuals apart from those with mediocre-or no-leadership skills?

I personally don't think it is necessarily an extremely high IQ, although good leaders are certainly smart. I don't think it is employment in a job with high visibility. And I don't think good leadership skills are innate skills that cannot be acquired through practice and through educational opportunities.

Here are my thoughts on what I think makes a good leader. Put together, these attributes spell A-H-I-M-A.

A-Ability. Good leaders have the ability to understand the technical requirements of the job; the ability to listen; and the ability to pay attention to what is happening internally and externally to the many forces affecting the profession.

H-Heart. Good leaders have the understanding that behind all health information are real people with real dreams, real fears, and real healthcare situations that can be affected by HIM.

I-Imagination. Good leaders look beyond the HIM world as we see it today and embrace change as a constant.

M-Management. Good leaders have good basic management skills regardless of the size or type of organization.

A-Attitude. Good leaders have a positive, can-do attitude to address whatever comes their way, turning adversity into achievement.

Becoming a Better Leader

Leadership from a Natural Systems Perspective

By Leslie Ann Fox, MA, RHIA, FAHIMA

Leadership is a phenomenon of natural systems necessary to ensure that a living system thrives and survives. It is not a set of skills or techniques directed at others, as we often think of it in human organizations, but rather it is the impact of one's

personal presence on a group that stimulates better performance. A natural systems perspective on organizations shines new light on leadership and how to become a more effective leader.

Like a pack of wolves, a troop of chimpanzees, or an ant colony, organizations are natural systems. Relationships in natural systems are fluid, with alliances forming and reforming, leaders being replaced from time to time, and members entering or leaving the group. External forces continuously pose threats and offer opportunities. Change and adaptation are ongoing. Successful natural systems are resilient; they flourish regardless of the changing environment. That is true of wolves and chimpanzees, and it is true in human organizations.

Like other natural systems, successful human organizations have a high degree of cooperation among all their members. The book *Leading a Business in Anxious Times: A Systems Approach to Becoming More Effective in the Workplace* states, "Successful leadership is a relationship process among members of an organization that inspires them to take full advantage of opportunities, recognize and minimize threats to success, and avoid catastrophic failures."¹ In an organization with flexibility and a culture that fosters open, honest, and equal relationships, leaders can emerge at any level and at various times, depending on the needs of the organization.

In this broader, nontraditional view of organizations, leadership and authority are different. Authority comes from one's position in the hierarchy, but leadership is more than a job description. It is the capacity of an individual to engage others in relationships that inspire them, to embrace a vision of the future that has value for the organization and society, and to perform better, faster, or more creatively to achieve that vision. Individuals with authority can be successful leaders, but so can individuals who do not have formal authority.

Choosing to become a better leader requires one to be more observant of the wider system and to be self-reflective—to take responsibility for one's part in relationships and to strive to achieve greater emotional maturity (i.e., the ability to keep thinking instead of reacting) even in times of acute stress or in organizations that are chronically anxious.

Anxiety ebbs and flows in organizations, but individuals who consistently think clearly and communicate calmly are the most effective with anxious colleagues. They do not spread anxiety, they reduce it. They see all sides of an issue and elicit thoughtful responses rather than reactivity. They challenge others to achieve a compelling vision, creating enthusiasm, not resentment or fear.

Emotionally mature individuals emerge as informal leaders and lead alongside those in authority. They are clear about their values and principles and manage their own anxiety. Their presence and thoughtful engagement with others calm the emotional system in an organization, enabling others to think more clearly, assert their own ideas with confidence, and work productively with colleagues in creatively meeting the challenges of their time. Such leadership requires motivation and a real commitment to lifelong personal development.

AHIMA's Leadership Academy

AHIMA partnered with FranklinCovey to provide Leadership Academy webinars to advance AHIMA members' leadership competencies. The webinars enable participants to learn to assume new, complex roles and demonstrate leadership in an era of rapid change. The series is designed for HIM leaders, senior managers, educators, and executives pursuing professional excellence.

Through the knowledge disseminated in these webinars, AHIMA members have had the opportunity to expand their knowledge of specific leadership techniques and further hone these newly acquired skills through the toolkits provided and discussions on AHIMA's Communities of Practice.

To find out more about AHIMA's Leadership Academy, visit www.ahima.org/leadership [web page no longer available].

Note

1. Fox, Leslie Ann, and Katharine Gratwick Baker. *Leading a Business in Anxious Times: A Systems Approach to Becoming More Effective in the Workplace*. Chicago, IL: Care Communications, 2009.
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Leaders and Leadership, Building Trust

By Carolyn Valo, MS, RHIT, FAHIMA

To lead implies many things-leading a project, a self-managed or self-directed team activity, or becoming a department director, manager, or supervisor, all the way to extending and applying gained skills, advanced education, and experiential learning to perhaps lead a large enterprise.

As a member of AHIMA, there are many tools, resources, and learning opportunities available to each one of us, such as the Leadership Academy, other related online education, the Body of Knowledge, and the Communities of Practice, all of which are accessible from AHIMA's Web site. Leadership, however, goes beyond these notable educational tools and resources. AHIMA and each component state association provide opportunities to expand our learning around leading and serving in leadership roles through volunteering.

Learning to become a leader goes beyond skill building and experiential learning; for many, including me, networking with our peers helps us identify role models and mentors with leadership experience. Combined, these tools, resources, and networking options can help provide pathways to becoming a leader, if desired.

Inspiring Trust

Trust is a key imperative of leadership. In fact, trust and leadership may even seem synonymous. As a leader, trust is at the core of effectively leading people, processes, tasks, or activities.

Leaders who inspire trust must gain trust as a first good step in leadership. A high degree of trust between a leader and his or her staff or among team members helps reach desired goals or outcomes. Leaders who display or extend trust and demonstrate active listening skills encourage open participation, motivate individuals, and more importantly, they inspire others to demonstrate trust in team or project work.

Trust requires clarity (of goals and roles), confidence (in staff and team members), consistency (in how processes are applied), and active listening skills in order to encourage all to participate in tasks and activities. Trust helps foster common understanding and collaboration, which leads to efficiently reaching desired goals or the organization's vision and mission.

As an example of how an HIM manager can inspire trust, assume that a manager just learned accounts receivables, or AR (days or dollars), are outside the target. The manager decides to seek direct input from the staff that performs the day-to-day functions related to AR.

When the manager takes, as a first step, engaging the staff to problem-solve the missed AR target, the staff members feel confident that the manager trusts in their knowledge, skills, and ability and are more likely to be motivated to reach decisions on how to realign and maintain the AR target. In addition, this approach likely fosters open and active staff collaboration and participation. In this example, inspired trust results in gained trust, with staff taking ownership for monitoring and developing practices or processes related to maintaining the department's AR target.

As you explore becoming a leader or encouraging others to lead, consider this statement on leadership skills: "Leadership is not exerting power over others or exhorting them to follow you. Rather, it results from your example of empowering others to step up and lead. Leaders do that by learning to lead themselves, becoming self-aware and behaving authentically."¹

Note

1. George, Bill. "Leadership Skills Start with Self-Awareness." Minneapolis Star Tribune, February 26, 2011. www.startribune.com/business/116923928.html.

Unleashing Your Team's Talent

By Debi Primeau, MA, RHIA, FAHIMA

Steven R. Covey states, "The call and need of a new era is for *greatness*... Tapping into the higher reaches of human genius and motivation requires leaders to have a new mind-set, a new skill-set, and a new tool set."¹ The ways of running a company or leading a team are no longer the same, and we require new knowledge and tools to be successful in the 21st century.

Inspiring Others

Unleashing talent requires leaders to give team members an opportunity to be heard, to guide them in their performance, and to provide a clear path where team members feel supported. It requires leaders to inspire others to meet the goals or vision of the organization by building consensus, creating a climate that empowers others through inclusion and full participation, as well as stimulating ownership and accountability.

In addition, leaders must motivate individuals by mentoring and coaching while advocating continuous learning through self-assessment and improvement.

Finding the Voice

When people are treated as whole people, they volunteer their highest efforts and energies, and when people are treated as things, they withhold their full commitment. Individuals have a choice as to what level of engagement they are committed.

In order to unleash the talent within and to attain the highest commitment from team members, leaders must engage in productive conversations to determine the team members' level of engagement. Individual commitments can range from rebellion or quitting, malicious obedience, willing compliance, cheerful cooperation, heartfelt commitment, and even creative excitement. These conversations can be informal or formal.

A more formal approach might include a scheduled discussion where specific questions might be asked. For example:

- What needs do you see on our team?
- What is the one thing you could do that would create the most value on our team?
- What have you always loved doing?
- What job-related opportunities are you passionate about?
- What are you really good at?
- What opportunities do you see for growth and development?
- What would make your work more meaningful?

Win-Win Performance Management

Win-win performance management allows the leader and the team member to openly discuss and mutually agree upon the desired results, guidelines, resources, accountability, and consequences for a specific project with a defined end date. It establishes the key criteria, standards, policies, or procedures that should be followed; what people, budget, and tools are required; how often and to whom feedback should be given; and what rewards or consequences would occur if the agreement is not fulfilled.

A win-win performance management agreement should be reviewed at least quarterly. It provides the leader the opportunity to provide clear support to the team member. It also allows the leader to neither micromanage nor abandon the team member but to run alongside and support to achieve mutually agreed-upon goals.

Tapping into the higher talents of individual team members promotes positive personal and professional outcomes that lead to success for the team member, the leader, and the organization.

Note

1. Covey, Steven. *The 8th Habit: From Effectiveness to Greatness*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2004.

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