CHANGE MANAGEMENT: CORE LEADERSHIP TENETS FOR A BOLD FUTURE

By Jess Jones

Healthcare is experiencing an unprecedented rate of change on par with major industrywide transformations such as the race to implement electronic health record systems. While some leaders may look to return to normal, successful leaders will go beyond that to embrace a new future. This will involve the complete transformation of business models, technology and care delivery. Healthcare leaders must also address change needed within the heart of their organization: its workforce.

The healthcare workforce is being asked to think and operate differently, challenging people's professional and mental fortitude. Leaders must be prepared to guide teams in a way that encourages agility and resilience. Workforces that are prepared for and thrive amid change will be the foundation for whether new initiatives — and big transformations — succeed or fail.

Though change is difficult, leaders have the opportunity to embrace several core leadership tenets that help forge bold, change-ready cultures driven to succeed in the rapidly shifting business environments of the future.

Avoid Ambiguity

A lack of transparency creates ambiguity and uncertainty, especially when leading people through change. Providing transparency into organizational plans, including what it will take to execute those plans, enables a workforce to sufficiently prepare for the challenges ahead. Additionally, consistent, relevant and purposeful messaging helps employees understand the "why" and "how" behind organizational changes, increasing retention of information and the adoption of new behaviors and cultural norms. Communicating to employees about anticipated challenges and realistic timelines engages them in solving the problems for the future and preparing them for what is to come.

Effective communication requires a deliberate messaging framework that will incorporate multiple platforms and ensure information is distributed logically and timely for the team to retain and react. Diversifying the platforms for receiving and sharing information, such as town halls, podcasts, emails, newsletters and text messages, enables employees to receive messages multiple times, leading to greater retention of information. Furthermore, it helps leaders engage team members in channels that are most relevant to them.

Building employee confidence in leadership is also an important component of creating an agile and resilient workforce. Decisions backed by

proof adds to leaders' credibility, and employees are more likely to trust in their direction setting. Leaders can make a compelling case for change by sharing business data that reflects not only individual department goals but also how the department is making progress in support of the organization's goals. Including timelines and milestones for specific projects can also strengthen employee resolve to succeed and accelerate the adoption of new behaviors and best practices.

Reinforce Purpose

It is well known that employees become more engaged and resilient when they feel a sense of purpose in their role, especially in a field such as healthcare where empathy is critical. As organizations weather change and uncertainty, leaders have an opportunity to tap into healthcare professionals' sense of purpose. Take time to clearly communicate expectations for the team and explain how everyone's role feeds into the broader plan behind organizational change. This must be done at both the team and individual level, requiring leaders to be accessible and visible. Leaders should make themselves available to answer questions and offer support with regular rounding on employees, which helps to show they are invested in the team's success. Rounding can also be an opportunity for leaders to model new behaviors and provide honest and constructive feedback.

Leaders can further create purpose by enabling learning and development. To be successful, leaders must take a personalized approach to talent development by identifying high and low performers. Empower and inspire high performers to take on more responsibility and ownership in tackling unconventional challenges that result from organizational change. Work with low performers to manage workload and allow them to shadow high performers to drive home performance expectations. Use rounding to monitor the success of development strategies and be prepared to adjust quickly, particularly if progress is not seen in low performers.

Model Resilience

Change management is an iterative process and frequently involves setbacks and subsequent retooling of the original operational strategy. Individuals or entire teams may struggle to adapt when faced with continual change, leading to burnout and an inefficient and demoralized team. Leaders play an important role in how their teams rebound and move forward amid setbacks large and small.

First, a leader must examine their own resilience and be aware of what behavior they model to their team. Resilient leaders acknowledge the challenges and the work involved to be successful, and they support their teams by removing barriers and anticipating risks. They consistently communicate the purpose behind the change.

Second, leaders can create resilience for individual team members by anchoring changes to personal wins or "what's in it for them." The value of change will be different for each person. For example, it may be grounded in the ease it will create for their patients, the efficiency it will create in the long term, or the career growth this experience will afford them.

Finally, to proactively foster resilience in your team following any setback, a leader must make people part of the solution. Create a safe environment for forums that allow for bold ideas to be shared amongst the team. By examining together what went wrong, reviewing daily lessons learned and determining what to correct as a group, leaders show their teams how to persevere through setbacks and maintain a relentless loyalty to the mission.

Inspire Ambition

The most impactful leaders give their teams the confidence to push their limits. Leaders can mobilize their teams for the opportunities a disruptive environment provides and encourage them to present new ideas for themselves or the

team to perform at a higher level. Recognize and reward team members who strive for excellence and continue learning after a task or a project is complete.

As leaders guide their organizations into the new future, success depends on the organization's ability to adapt and grow through an agile and resilient workforce. By creating an environment that consistently welcomes and supports employees through change, leaders ensure their organizations are ready to overcome setbacks and move on opportunities.

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Key Takeaways

Teams are not only navigating constant change; they are embracing a new future. Leaders can help teams thrive in this environment with change management and leadership tenets that promote change and innovation.

Think differently.
Create buy-in for change by tapping into healthcare professionals' sense of purpose, and personalize the value that change can bring to them as an individual.

Plan differently.
Build confidence in leadership by communicating change initiatives backed with data insights, and involve employees in problem-solving whenever possible.

Act differently.
Model positive behaviors and resilience and set the right stage to encourage feedback and bold ideas from team members.

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