

Guest Editorial

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LEARN ABOUT LEADERSHIP AND NEVER STOP

The NHS is not one organisation; it's made up of hundreds of individual organisations, each with their own unique culture – and often sub or 'micro' cultures. Consider all of the teams and departments that are working together for patients and their loved ones; where would they be without effective leadership? And for those not well-led, consider where they would be if they were. Peter Homa and Claire Lodge, from the NHS Leadership Academy, explore why learning about leadership is one of the wisest investments you can make.

When it comes to leadership rather than management – influencing and motivating rather than directing and controlling – hierarchies and positional power only get us so far. In high-pressure settings, good leadership can be the difference between life and death. In high stress environments, communication needs to be seamless and everyone needs to trust their team and feel trusted. Good leaders create the environments in which these conditions flourish.

Doctors and fellow clinicians are uniquely-placed to take on leadership roles; who better to decide how care should be arranged and resourced than the staff at the heart of delivering it? Increasingly, clinicians are taking leadership roles across the NHS. The Leadership Academy supports leaders across the arc of their working lives.

As a student doctor, you use your leadership skills every day. You may not be using them consciously, but you're still using them. In his paper: "*Are you an unconscious or conscious leader*", John Wood sets out the differences and beliefs between the two approaches, some of which are included below:

- **Appearing fearless:** Although they experience fear, as all people do, they are not governed by it and simply use it to channel their energy and effort.
- **Being extraordinary, active listeners:** They are curious about and listen deeply to others. They encourage those who have a different reality to express their views, fully and frankly. They are not threatened by that difference.
- **They are vanguards** – champions for the advancement of their colleagues for the greater good. They are courageous yet humble in sponsoring what they see will assist those they serve.
- **Not blindly following:** They don't 'tow the party line,' making independent decisions, maintaining their integrity even when pressured to vote with the in-crowd, while relying for guidance on accumulated wisdom and common sense.
- **Personifying loyalty.** Even when practical realities demand they make difficult decisions, including personnel decisions, they do so from integrity and conscience.

All of the above are manifested as innate self-confidence, regardless of seniority. This will be recognised as credible and compelling leadership.

The Leadership Academy programme draws on these insights and supports leaders to be themselves more skillfully. Sometimes the way we behave as leaders and the way we view ourselves as leaders are very different things – it's a blind spot for some of us. We aim to help our participants close that gap, increasing self-awareness and knowing how to harness our skills. Learning to understand your impact on others is a key leadership skill.

Leadership is not simply about being told what to do by someone more senior. Effective leadership requires humanity, humility, compassion and diversity in which difference is treasured to enrich achievement of shared goals. Great leadership encourages these qualities in others. As one of our leadership programme participants recently said: *"I'm confident that I'm doing things that are right for the NHS, not just because someone has said they need to be done."*

Evidence shows that compassionate leadership leads to improved staff engagement and better patient outcomes and care. The Leadership Academy involves patients and carers at every stage of leaders' development to ensure that leaders understand how they can have a positive impact on patient care. We recently worked with the parent of an eight-year-old patient, Tommy, who has developmental delay of his gross motor skills. Tommy's mum told us how every NHS appointment feels like starting all over again. That the way Tommy is greeted – such a small thing to many – can have a profound impact on his wellbeing. The way we conduct ourselves at work impacts on people's health and their wellbeing. Many clinical teams now practice *"Schwartz Rounds"*. These rounds create a safe environment in which teams can share concerns and insights that help build high trust and highly performing teams. As Gandhi said: *"Be the change you want to see in the world"*.

Be a great teacher, and have one

Great leaders are, in part, the product of those who led them. We all have people in our lives that shape our life story. They have an enduring impact. Who are yours? And whose life stories will you help to shape?

Regardless of hierarchy, leaders are looked to as teachers, and will find themselves being asked for their input and counsel. But it's equally critical that we too have someone to approach for wisdom and advice. The Academy's coaching and mentoring service caters for staff at all levels, and tellingly, there's considerable resource for chief executives, who are offered membership to our development network in the first two years of their role and are then offered the opportunity to impart their wisdom to existing and aspiring chief executives.

Leadership is a lifelong journey, so not only is being a great teacher important – having them is too.

Exceptional leaders are often great teachers and great learners. When teaching, they elicit learning from their personal and professional lives, sharing their experience and teaching with authenticity. Great leaders encourage others' continuous professional and personal development. Many of the NHS Leadership Academy's alumni have relationships with the Academy that span many years and will stretch into the future. An NHS chief executive recently said: *"The impact of the NHS Leadership Academy's development work on me has been two-fold; to listen and understand other examples that I've used in my thinking and planning, and to listen to examples of how other chief executives work, and different styles, which has also been useful. I've also been able to offer my experience to others and in return gain extra knowledge from other parts of the country"*.

Our invitation to you is to consider the NHS Leadership Academy as a resource and one of your spiritual homes in which you can learn how to become even more effective as you write your clinical and leadership story.

Go boldly, go well.

REFERENCES

1. Conscious Leadership Connection. Are you unconscious or conscious leader? 2015 [accessed 27 Dec 2018]. Available from: http://www.consciousleadershipconnection.com/media/90745/unconscious_vs._conscious_leader_-_final.pdf.



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