leadership and development

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Fresh Page for a Fresh Decade: Leading in 2020

abstract

The beginning of a new decade is a time for reflection and goals. This is a good time to develop a leadership plan that combines the leadership focus for the new year and how to create a culture of fun. Leading is a complex and challenging experience and responsibility but it can also be fun and rewarding. Aligning new leadership priorities to creating a culture that is engaging and enjoyable could make 2020 a new decade of leadership. (J Contin Educ Nurs. 2010;51(2):60-61.)

More than 20% of the workforce today is older than age 65 years, and for the first time in history, five unique generations are working side by side and experimenting with the meaning of generational preferences and differences. These demographic issues have given rise to beliefs that all the generations are different—so unique in preferences and beliefs that conflict is inevitable. A recent analysis of multiple studies is refuting that set of beliefs and poses instead that the job attitude differences between generations is in fact small and inconsistent. Job attitudes are more likely to be a function of the journey and a normal transformation of “interests, needs, preferences, and strengths over the course of a career” trajectory rather than chronological age (King, Finkielstein, Thomas, & Corrington, 2019, para. 3). The bigger risk may not be the variance in preferences by age but rather the beliefs about variances in preferences by age that managers and leaders have about their workforce. Misinformed beliefs about how different ages behave and what they value can add stress and conflict to the work environment. When managers believe workers of different ages cannot work collaboratively or cannot share the same goals, they are reinforcing negative stereotypes and negatively affecting the work culture. Good leaders create opportunities for workers to share personal stories and professional values in the context of work projects where diverse workers can find and build personal bridges based on shared values and interests. When work groups can identify the intersections of their values and beliefs as part of a planned transformation, a strong foundation of trust and common interest can bring about new connections. One of the best ways to build comradery within any workgroup is to find humor in situations of high stress and intensity, such as building a common meme—a humorous image, video, or piece of text that is copied and used physically or electronically to represent a shared feeling or joke—that brings humor to the situation and reduces the tension. Such reminders and clever deescalation can generate laughts and happiness for months beyond the initial event and can build a shared history colored with humor, humility, and a belief that the team can get through anything together. It is the creation of shared histories, shared humor, and recognition of similar beliefs that creates group cohesion.

MAKING THE MOST OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

Accountable organizations attract accountable people (Mattone, 2019). Leaders who shy away from accountability find themselves at odds with advancing quality improvement and making meaningful change. Accountability means honest feedback is fostered. When people follow through on their commitments, and leaders set that expectation, the entire team benefits. A culture of accountability can still create opportunities for levity and humor if handled wisely. Leaders can engage teams in contests, campaigns, and recognitions that foster humane and supportive accountability rather than a more traditional cut-throat, competitive environment. Who is the most collaborative person on the team? Who lifted the efforts of others most effectively? Whose support and relentless attention to detail was essential to getting the team effort over the finish line? Tying such recognitions to popular icons from films or pop culture can help to make

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such events and campaigns more enjoyable (e.g., the Hermione Granger award for team support, Freddie Mercury humility award).

**DISTRIBUTING LEADERSHIP FOR INNOVATION**

Building project-based teams has the dual benefit of aligning resources to focus on innovative efforts and developing new leaders who learn how to analyze, design, iterate, implement, and reward the development of change initiatives that align with the organization’s larger goals. Developing leaders benefit from opportunities to work through new initiatives and build teams who can help. When identifying who will be the leader of a new initiative, it is important to distribute the leadership responsibilities and provide sponsorship, guidance, and support to the team and its leader. Sponsoring change and innovation teams may be the most important leadership work in the future. This means providing perspective, visibility, and support for the effort but also means helping developing leaders who understand the cultural implications of leading for change. Teams that lack a sense of purpose, focus, direction, and excitement are held back from their best and greatest contributions. This also applies to learning to attend to the culture of the team and the needs of the team of belonging. Team events, funny quotes, jokes, and fun activities are as important as structured agendas, timelines, and metrics. Supporting new leaders to find this balance and recognize the power in belonging is essential. Leaders’ humility and openness encourage others to step forward with grace and confidence—being more open to learning and growing.

**WHAT IS A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT LEADER TO DO?**

Finding a way to combine the concepts of multigenerational engagement, accountability, and leadership distribution may seem daunting but the savvy professional development leader will see the opportunities in a single phrase—embracing humane leadership. It may seem obvious at face value but a long history of management styles focusing exclusively on a single approach such as accountability or change management without the accompanying attentions to personal recognition, manager humility, group dynamics, and commitment to culture has left a wake of employee distrust and dissatisfaction. Leaders who build on the strengths of their teams can promote truth telling and accountability in ways that empower, rather than diminish, the energies of the team. Tropes and memes can encourage group identity and add a light touch to efforts that might otherwise feel onerous and stressful. Years ago, nurses made jokes about the special three-H enema (high, hot, and a hell of a lot). Jokes have been a part of keeping professionals lifted and connected for many decades. Making this the decade of these new three Hs—humor, humility, and humanity—is a worthy effort and focus for leadership in 2020. Jokes have been a part of keeping professionals lifted and connected for many decades. Making this the decade of these new three Hs—humor, humility, and humanity—is a worthy effort and focus for leadership in 2020.

**REFERENCES**
