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Leadership skills: a guide for the foundation year doctor

Introduction

It is often said that: 'One is a born leader and leaders cannot be made', but to what extent is this statement true? What did Mahatma Gandhi and Adolf Hitler have in common that made them effective leaders, despite being very different individuals?

Everyone has a hidden leader within him/her, including foundation year doctors. All you need to do is discover the leader within you. Whether you are managing the doctors' mess or leading your department to reach the national targets, every individual has his/her own leadership style. You can identify, understand and adapt yours, to ensure that you make an impact and become an effective leader.

Leadership and styles

Can leadership be developed? It largely depends on an individual's attitude. You can have the attitude of being a creative thinker and have an analytical approach. You can improve your knowledge and technical competencies in your field of interest and master management skills. You can be capable of taking risks and having the courage to face the consequences. You need to be open to ideas, criticism and advice.

It is very difficult to determine the best leadership style in a vast organization like the NHS, where there is a need for continuous quality improvement. Appropriate leadership is vital in the effectiveness of the organization.

Different leadership styles (Handy, 1993) include:

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- Bureaucratic – the team member is expected to follow procedures exactly as he/she has been told. For instance, this could involve following the protocol when rushing for a trauma call or being a member of a resuscitation team.
- Democratic – the leader invites other members of staff to participate in areas such as decision-making or designing a protocol.
- Transactional – this could be called a way of managing rather than true leadership. The leader has full authority for decision-making, arbitration and control over the team members. Sometimes, the leader uses rewards for meeting goals and punishments for not achieving the goals.
- Autocratic – an extreme form of transactional leadership which does not flourish in a large organization. In this style, the leader has absolute power over his/her team members, who have no say in what happens, whether or not it is good for the organization.
- Transformational style – this is most popularly what a true leader has, where he/she is innovative, has vision and uses his/her charismatic style by being a big driving force and pouring enthusiasm in the team members.

In a large organization like the NHS, no one style is correct. A situational style of leadership is prevalent, where the leader has to switch to a different style for each different situation for the organization as a whole to run.

How to be an effective leader

A good leader is someone who succeeds in putting innovative ideas into practice through others. Certain personal qualities and attributes make one an effective leader. These qualities include creativity and imagination, drive for improvement, analytical approach and collaborative working.

You need to be aware of both the internal and external environment and also human behaviour. You need to practise political astuteness when involved

in a large organization. For example, a clinical director needs to be aware of the local and national issues and be able successfully to apply them appropriately within the department. You always gain a lot of respect as a leader by demonstrating integrity and honesty within yourself. Being an inspirational communicator and a good decision-maker, being self-aware and having self-confidence are essential. The appropriate use of power and maintaining pride and dignity of other people adds considerable value.

A good leader should be able to identify what each team member is good at and allocate appropriate tasks to that individual. This not only encourages the person to work effectively and efficiently but also helps to achieve the goal quite successfully. As a leader, you cannot do everything on your own. Delegation manages your time to help you focus on other matters. Delegating a task to someone who is able and appropriate to do it gives him/her a

sense of power, responsibility and enthusiasm for doing a particular task, thereby developing a feeling of achievement in reaching the goal.

A good team leader needs to have high levels of emotional intelligence besides having good technical skills (Goleman, 1995). For a good team leader, self-awareness and self-regulation are equally important as understanding the emotions that prevail within the team. The ability to manage people and relationships is very important in all leaders.

Within a team comprising different people with different ideas, potential and capabilities, conflict among team members is likely to occur (Trivedi et al, 2008). The conflict could be to achieve power or to meet your aspirations in life. This hidden competing approach can be good for bringing in innovative ideas, but the problem begins when this kind of competitive behaviour takes on a destructive approach and builds in conflict that could be detri-

mental to healthy team-working. Identifying the differences within the team and addressing the issues effectively and confidently helps in smooth running of the team.

Conclusions

Anyone can become a leader at any stage of his/her career or in any job. There is no compulsion necessarily to aspire to be like Gandhi. You need to adopt the appropriate style for your team and organization. Having integrity can endear you to others and compel them to follow you – practise what you preach. **BJHM**

Conflict of interest: Dr Hooke has worked in both management and medicine.

Goleman D (1995) *Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*. Bantam Books, New York
 Handy C (1993) *Understanding Organizations*. 4th edn. Penguin Group, London
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KEY POINTS

- Leaders can be made and do not have to be born.
- You can be an effective leader at foundation year level or at any other stage in your career.
- There are many different leadership styles that are appropriate in different situations.
- Personal integrity and attitude are important.

Useful websites

NHS Leadership Qualities
www.nhsleadershipqualities.nhs.uk/
 NHS Improvement Leaders' Guides
www.institute.nhs.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=134&Itemid=35