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Why Emotional Intelligence is Important to a Clinical Department Administrator

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Why Listen to Me?

You may wonder why I am an expert on the importance of Emotional Intelligence to a hospital administrator. Not to toot my own horn but for two reasons: First, I have been a clinical department administrator (starting as Assistant, CFO, all the way up to CEO) in an academic medical center since 1994. Second, I did my dissertation on leadership qualities needed to succeed in my profession.

What is a Clinical Department Administrator?

Srica (2008) described typical administrators as “analytical, pragmatic, rational, structured, and organized. Administrators are accustomed and trained to search for clear images, to plan, organize, control and evaluate projects in a well structured */sic/* and standardized way” (p. 190). Administrators plan, coordinate, direct, and supervise others (Top Executives, 2009-2010). Administrative executive positions within academic medical centers may be called many names including chief executive officer, chief financial officer, and even general manager (Top Executives, 2009-2010). The role of a chief operating officer has several responsibilities, which may include overseeing other executives who direct the activities of various departments and implementation of the organization's guidelines on a day-to-day basis. A chief operating officer may also play a managerial role, working directly with personnel and managing daily operations. Competencies associated with administrative roles include: “communication skills; analytical skills; the ability to evaluate the relationships among numerous factors; leadership; self-confidence; motivation; decisiveness; flexibility; sound business judgment; and determination” (Top Executives, 2009-2010, para. 3).

A clinical department administrator has many functions. Among his or her responsibilities are operations, finances, human resources, facilities, information technology and security, compliance, quality control, strategic planning, fund raising, and community relations. As described by the Bureau of Labor and Statistics (2009), health care administrators are responsible for planning, directing, coordinating, and supervising the delivery of health care. Clinical administrators are specialists in charge of a specific clinical department.

What is the Difference between Social Intelligence and Emotional Intelligence?

I’ve put some thought into this. My interpretation is that you have to have emotional intelligence to act socially. Here are the factors I use to determine emotional intelligence:

- Impulse Control
- Delay of Immediate Gratification
- Mood regulation and preservation of motivation in frustrating situations
- Empathy for Others
- Remain in control of Emotions while focusing on and accomplishing goals
- Promote trust in employees and patients
- Ability to Manage One’s Surroundings
- Self-Confidence

- Attunement to Complex Social Cues

When a hospital administrator encounters social situations, his or her actions produce results. The results can be fit into these categories:

- Ability to Exercise Complex Social Skills such as Teamwork, Communication, Conflict resolution, Harmony, Consensus, Multiculturalism, etc.
- Expression of Oneself During Social Situations, Reading, and Comprehension of Different Types of social situations
- Interpersonal Problem solving Skills and Social Role Playing
- Understanding of Accepted Social Norms, Roles, and Scripts
- Skills Necessary for Task Completion
- Management of One's Behaviors that Positively Influence Group Member Perceptions

The outcomes one achieves when interacting in social situations determines one's level of social intelligence. The level of social intelligence is a reflection of one's emotional intelligence.

What do the Experts say on the subject of Emotional Intelligence?

Riggio and Reichard (2008) believed the components of emotional intelligence (EI) key to leadership were emotional expressiveness, regulation and control of one's emotional displays, and sensing follower's needs and feelings. Eason (2009) thought an essential for leaders to develop is emotional and social competence. Eason (2009) listed three components of EI to include impulse control and delay of immediate gratification; mood regulation and preservation of motivation in frustrating situations; and empathy for others (Goleman, 1995, in Eason, 2009). By exhibiting EI, leaders can remain in control of emotions while focusing on and accomplishing goals. High EI also can promote trust in employees and patients.

Polsfuss and Ardichvili (2009) presented additional material on the ability to manage one's surroundings, especially people, through development of state-of-mind competency. Polsfuss and Ardichvili (2009) mentioned the other types of competencies (namely, behavioral, cognitive, and emotional-based competencies) but were adamant in the assertion that a master competency exists that merges mind, consciousness, and thought. This master competency called state-of-mind (SOM) can be initiated before behavioral, cognitive, or emotional competencies. The leader who can engage the SOM competency looks for triggers of insecurity and discontent and objectively and consciously uses an inner calm and creativity to change negative energy into positive energy through wise and effective decision-making. The SOM can be developed through leadership development and coaching.

What do the Experts say on the subject of Social Intelligence?

Srica (2008) defined social intelligence as the "ability to exercise complex social skills such as teamwork, communication, conflict resolution, harmony, consensus, multiculturalism etc." (p. 190). Social intelligence has been connected to effective leadership. Riggio and Reichard (2008) defined social intelligence as acting and thinking wisely in social environments. Important social skills reflected in

one's social intelligence abilities are expression of oneself during social situations, reading, and comprehension of different types of social situations. Interpersonal problem-solving skills and social role-playing skills are key social skills. Understanding of accepted social roles, norms, and scripts are also important social skills.

Hoffman and Frost (2006) defined social intelligence as one's capabilities to grasp and adapt to different social interactions. Characteristics of social intelligence are the identification of skills necessary for task completion, attunement to complex social cues, and management of one's behaviors that positively influence group member perceptions. Socially intelligent leaders are alert to the work environment and socially perceptive. They possess an innate understanding and exhibit flexibility to respond to diverse social situations. "Traits characteristic of individuals with strong social intelligence include good oral communication skills, self-confidence, sociability, capacity for status, stress tolerance, and an understanding of the social dynamics of organizational problem-solving (Bass, 2001; Hoffman & Frost, 2006, p. 39).

My Take-Away

As an academic medical center clinical department administrator the qualities of leadership are of great interest at a personal level. Through the years as a lower level administrator to my current position, I have witnessed people who have been successful in the administrator position and people who have struggled and eventually failed. Working for or with a struggling administrator that does not earn the respect of employees or colleagues, seems to commit one social blunder after another, and fails to emit an aura of trust and competence can be a challenge. By the time executive leadership finally realizes that the struggling administrator does not motivate employees to the degree necessary for superior output, the price to the organization may be costly. This kind of administrator leads one to question what qualities executive leadership saw in the candidate that they felt would make a good administrative leader. Years of experience working with different personalities and different skill levels have led to the question of what qualities must one possess to be not only efficient and competent at the physical aspects of the job, but also what are the intangible behaviors that make an administrator able to move people in positive directions and withstand the pressures that come with the position. My conclusion is that high emotional intelligence leads to the most favorable outcomes in social situations.

What Can Be Done with My Revelations about the Importance of Emotional Intelligence

Three recommendations to health care organizations can be taken from my research.

One recommendation to organizations would be when interviewing candidates for administrative positions to have candidates demonstrate emotional intelligence by placing them in scenarios where they have to show a certain level of mastery of undesirable social situations. This may weed out people who cannot remain level-headed in times of crisis or cannot recognize the real meaning of a conversation embedded in innuendos.

A second recommendation to organizations may be to implement developmental programs to enhance the leadership qualities of current clinical department administrators and develop the essential

competencies in personnel within the organization that would like to be involved in clinical department administration.

At an individual level, persons seeking clinical department administration should expand upon competencies expressed as largely relevant to the position, stressing social development, communication skills, and advancement of leadership competencies. Current clinical department administrators should work to improve or augment competencies that may offer effective leadership guidance.

Conclusion

I have pinpointed the qualities that I perceive as demonstrable emotional intelligences. But I am not at all limiting the reader to my list. The reader may identify other qualities that meet the definitions of emotional and social intelligences. In addition, even though I have qualified these intelligences as those pertinent to the discipline of clinical department administration, these intelligences are applicable to almost all positions of authority. The take away is this—a high emotional intelligence quotient is essential to the skill set of anyone willing to take on the stressors of working in high pressure professions.

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