Transformational Leadership and Building Relationships With Clinical Instructors

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HIGHLY QUALIFIED and motivated clinical instructors contribute greatly to a successful health profession education program. Factors such as burnout, role strain, and poor relationships with academic faculty have been shown to hinder the effectiveness of clinical instructors (CIs). Transformational leaders can help CIs overcome these issues by building and maintaining productive relationships that bring about positive changes in individuals and programs. While research has demonstrated that Athletic Training Program Directors do self-report as a means to lean toward practicing transformational leadership, there is always room for improvement. Transformational leadership can be both taught and learned. Managers who have completed leadership training and counseling, and/or received feedback about their leadership, improved in self-reported leadership behaviors, received improved ratings from subordinates, and experienced enhanced group performance. The purpose of this report is to present a model of transformational leadership and to provide examples of how its principles can be applied to an ATEP.

**Transformational Leadership**

PDs who want to practice transformational leadership can request feedback from other faculty, supervisors, and subordinates and attend leadership workshops. An easy beginning step is to identify one’s current leadership style through the use of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) or some other leadership assessment tool. Using the MLQ, Avolio et al. identified a model of transformational leadership that includes four distinct components (Table 1): idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

**Table 1. Four Tenets of Transformational Leadership**

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<th>Idealized influence</th>
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**Key Points**

- Strong relationships between faculty and clinical instructors create quality educational experiences.
- Transformational leadership practices are effective in building positive relationships.
- Transformational leaders assess and satisfy the needs of others to reach goals.
Idealized Influence

Idealized influence relates to the manner a leader is viewed by others. Transformational leaders are trusted, respected, and admired. Others want to follow his or her consistent example of strong ethics, principles, and values. Such leaders build a rapport with others by making a concerted effort to put the needs of others above his or her own personal needs. Becoming a transformational leader requires the PD to become a strong role model. The PD must demonstrate unyielding integrity and must build trust with CIs on a daily basis. Even small compromises in integrity can result in persistent distrust. Full transparency and honesty in issues affecting the academic program are essential to demonstrate the value placed on ethical conduct.

Inspirational Motivation

Inspirational motivation relates to the ability of a leader to provide meaning and challenge to others’ work. Although there are many ways to motivate others, transformational leaders focus on intrinsic motivation, i.e., inspiring others to achieve goals for personal satisfaction and to promote the success of the program and its students. Less emphasis is placed on extrinsic motivation, such as gifts, cash awards, and other “perks.” Inspirational motivation applies to teams as well as individuals. In addition to motivating individual faculty members and CIs to work toward achievement of personal goals, the PD should also motivate the entire ATEP team to achieve a shared vision. In nursing, transformational leaders have been found to build greater organizational commitment and to lower employee attrition. Having a transformational leader has also been found to produce greater job satisfaction for teachers.

PDs can inspire motivation by being the CI’s biggest fan. Sincere compliments about CIs to students, other faculty members, administrators, and to each CI personally lets them know that they are appreciated. One-on-one feedback should focus on the positive aspects of the CI’s performance. PDs should look for examples of things that a CI does well (e.g., teaching a student a new technique in a creative way) and say “Thank you.” CIs should also be thanked and recognized for equipment loans, guest lectures, and/or feedback that benefits the ATEP. PDs should take advantage of every opportunity to show appreciation for the contributions of CIs through personal letters, designation of clinical faculty status, recognition in alumni newsletters or the program’s website, letters of commendation to CIs’ supervisors, and award nominations.

Intellectual Stimulation

Transformational leaders look for input from others to develop a shared vision for the organization. All members of the program team are encouraged to share ideas for overcoming obstacles to achieve the shared vision. Team members are not ridiculed or criticized for making mistakes or suggesting impractical ideas. Shared decision making inspires followers to reflect upon the successes and failures of the program and to develop suggestions for improvement and growth.

PDs should encourage CIs to present creative solutions to problems that arise. If program administrators are struggling to find a way to meet an accreditation guideline, particularly one related to clinical education, they should seek the advice of those who supervise the students. Changes to the clinical education plan will probably be adopted more readily if the idea originated with the CIs. When the academic faculty meet to review and/or revise the strategic plan of the program, CIs should be encouraged to participate, thus taking ownership of new directions for the program. CIs who have come from different educational programs may have unique ideas to share that will help the ATEP to achieve its goals. For example, a CI who has had experience with service learning may suggest implementation of a service learning requirement in the curriculum.

Once a collective vision has been established, CIs should also be involved in the development of a plan for achieving the vision. Administrators need to explain how the ATEP is limited by accreditation guidelines and/or legal considerations. CIs should be given an opportunity to identify changes that present problems for them. Sharing ownership of a program can be difficult, but it is also rewarding. Development of a partnership with CIs, rather than working with them as reluctant participants, can create a more cohesive program.

PDs can also intellectually stimulate CIs by seeking their input on important decisions that affect the ATEP (e.g., program admissions, scholarships/awards, curriculum revision, self study/site visit preparation, student handbook revisions, hiring decisions, equipment purchases, clinical assignments, and faculty