**CHAPTER** 15

**Leadership in Long-Term Care**

Learning Objectives

After completing this chapter, readers will be able to:

1.   Discuss the role of leadership in long-term care.

2.   Identify the components of leadership.

3.   Identify the characteristics of successful leaders.

4.   Identify and understand the skills needed by successful leaders.

5.   Understand how to gain or improve leadership skills.

**■ Introduction**

It would be a huge understatement to say that leadership is one of the most important building blocks in the foundation of successful long-term care delivery. As the field of long-term care evolves, so must the profession transform itself to keep pace. Leadership is required now more than ever to continuously look for ways to maintain or bolster organizational creativity and innovation (Dana & Olson, 2007). As one group of authors stated:

An organization’s leadership sets the tone for the entire system. Leaders’ visibility makes them uniquely positioned to define the organization’s quality goals, communicate these goals and gain acceptance from staff, make learning a priority, and marshal the resources necessary for the vision to become reality. (Smith, Saunders, Stuckhardt, & McGinnis, 2013, p. 257)

**■ Leadership**

What is leadership, anyway? It is a term we use regularly, but not always accurately. It means different things to different people and different things in different situations. We each have our own concept of what it is and how it is demonstrated.

There are many excellent and time-tested theories about leadership and an equal number of books, articles, and websites discussing those theories, including:

•   Transformational leadership

•   Transactional leadership

•   Strategic leadership

•   Participative leadership

•   Collaborative leadership

•   Servant leadership

•   Situational leadership

It is not within the scope or intention of this text to discuss and elaborate on each of these theories, but rather to look at leadership as it applies to long-term care.

There are also many scholarly definitions of leadership. Most are arbitrary and subjective. Some are more useful than others, but there is no single, correct definition of leadership (Yuki, 2006). The one thing the various definitions have in common is that they all involve purposeful influence in a group or organization (Dana & Olson, 2007).

One definition that captures the essence of leadership particularly well came not from a scholarly journal, but from a popular novel of the 1960s. In *The Pyramid Climbers*, author Vance Packard noted that leadership “appears to be the art of getting others to want to do something that you are convinced should be done” (Packard, 1962, p. 13). The beauty of that definition is that it separates leadership into three distinct components:

**1.**   Influencing others (getting others to do something)

**2.**   Providing direction (something you are convinced should be done)

**3.**   Getting voluntary acceptance (getting them to want to do it)

Should any of these three components be missing, effective leadership will not be possible. Keep this definition in mind; it is the basis for our discussion of leadership skills.

**■ Leaders: Who Are They?**

Who are the leaders in long-term care (or other) organizations? There are a number of questions, assumptions, and misunderstandings about who leaders are. Let us look at some of them with the goal of understanding leaders better.

Are Leaders Born or Created?

The question has long been asked whether leaders are born or made. Actually, what is really being asked is whether anyone can be a leader or only a few. James Kouzes and Barry Posner, authors of the highly successful text, *The Leadership Challenge*, answer the question emphatically and definitively, saying, “It’s just pure myth that only a few can ever understand the intricacies of leadership. Leadership is not a gene, and it’s not a secret code that can’t be deciphered by ordinary people” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 145). Leadership is not only for a few.

Granted, leadership comes more easily to some than others, but it is a set of skills that can be learned. Anyone can have the fundamental requirements necessary for the leadership role. It has been said that there’s only one thing that a person needs to actually be born with in order to be a leader later in life: intelligence. A leader needs to be smart *enough*, but effective leaders aren’t necessarily the smartest people. They do have to know enough to do the job. We discuss those skills and how they are acquired and applied in considerable detail later in this chapter.

Leaders Are Prescient Visionaries

Are leaders more farsighted than others? Can they foretell the future? Do they know what tomorrow will bring? The answer to all of these questions is no. They are obviously intelligent enough to look at trends and try to proactively anticipate what may happen, but they have no special prophetic gifts. They study the past and learn from it. They apply skills such as strategic thinking and planning, which we explore later.

Leaders Are Charismatic, Possess a Special Gift

Leaders have the ability to convince others to follow them, but is that a special gift? Is it charisma—defined as “a personal magic of leadership arousing special popular loyalty or enthusiasm for a public figure (as a political leader) or a special magnetic charm or appeal” (Merriam-Webster, 2014)? Leaders certainly have charm and appeal that arouse loyalty, but again, it’s not something special that only a few have.

Leadership Is Associated With a Superior Position

Leadership does not automatically relate to a position as supervisor or boss. In an ideal situation, all managers will be leaders, but that is not always the case. Some managers are unable to make the transition to leader. Similarly, not all leaders are managers. In any organization or work group, there will likely be one or two individuals to whom others routinely turn for advice or counsel, regardless of their job or position. They are leaders.

Leadership Is a Matter of Control

There was a time (long ago) when managers were taught that they had to control those they supervised, meaning to dominate, manipulate, or rule them. It implied that those supervised could not be trusted to do what is right. That is not leadership. Leadership means getting those others to want to do what is needed. A leader “is one who converts followers to leaders” (Bennis & Nanus, 1985, p. 3).

Leaders Are Remote and Distant

Another outdated management belief is that managers must be detached from their subordinates; they must be remote and distant. The idea was that they had to be seen as superior and could not break down the barrier between them and their employees. Actually, all that demonstrated was the insecurity of the managers. Leadership requires just the opposite—that leaders be seen as approachable by their followers.

**■ Common Characteristics of Leaders**

People look for certain things in their leaders, whether they are in long-term care or some other business. Research by Kouzes and Posner (2007) demonstrated that the top characteristics they look for are honesty, forward-looking, inspiring, and competency.

Honesty

Honesty goes beyond simply not committing crimes (although that is important). It also means being sincere. Followers want their leaders to be genuine. They want to know that what they see is what they get, and they reject phoniness, artificiality, and hypocrisy. Honesty means being fair and treating all equally. If some are treated differently from others—or are perceived to be treated differently—the leader will lose his or her followers’ respect. If the leader is seen as honest, followers will understand it even when things do not go as they might wish.

Honesty also implies being trustworthy. It means saying what you mean and meaning what you say. Leaders should be willing to admit their mistakes and their faults. Followers must know that they can trust their leader. As leadership icon Warren Bennis puts it, “Leadership without mutual trust is a contradiction in terms” (Bennis, 2003, p. 131). Such trust takes a long time to develop but can be lost in an instant. A single failure of trust can invalidate many prior successes. Engendering trust is a competency that can be learned, applied, and understood. It is something that you can get good at, something you can measure and improve, something for which you can “move the needle.” You cannot be an effective leader without trust (Covey, 2009).

Another aspect of honesty that is sometimes overlooked is being unselfish. Leaders must be secure enough in their roles to take blame for mistakes, even when those mistakes were the fault of others, and to give credit to others, even when the leader might properly deserve some of the credit. Being unselfish requires that a leader have patience with those who do not know as much as she or he does. There is a good feeling in knowing that you know—that should be enough.

Forward-Looking

People expect their leaders to be forward-looking. We have already said that they are not prescient, nor do they have special visionary powers. People expect leaders to have a sense of direction and a concern for the future of the organization. They must know where they are going if they expect others to willingly join them on the journey (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). A leader is not satisfied with the status quo.

Inspiring

Individuals want their leaders to be inspiring. The term *inspiring* is not used here in the religious sense, although most religious leaders are indeed inspiring. Rather, it means that a leader takes people where they did not think they could go. The leader makes them believe they can do things they had previously thought they could not. They “breathe life into people’s dreams and aspirations, making those people much more willing to enlist in the movement” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 34). To better understand *inspiring* in this context, readers are urged to look the term up in a thesaurus (it can be done very easily online). It matches terms such as invigorating, enlivening, encouraging, motivating, energizing, and stimulating.

Competency

Leaders are expected to know what they are doing—to be competent. Their followers must believe in them and their ability to lead. In a field such as long-term care, there are two kinds of competence. First, the leader must be competent in the profession being practiced, such as nursing, rehabilitation, or management. That does not mean that the leader has to know as much as all of the technical professionals supervised, but he or she must know enough about them to “speak their language” and know whether they are performing well or not. A leader must know what he or she can do and what she or he cannot. He or she should not show off (as opposed to demonstrating competence). Others will see through it quickly and lose respect.

A second kind of competence is leadership competence. As we discuss later, there are specific leadership skills, and a person’s ability to practice those skills is all too observable to subordinates or followers.

These characteristics are only a few of those common to successful leaders, but they are the ones most often cited.

**■ Leadership Skills**

Do you remember the Vance Packard definition we discussed at the beginning of this chapter? It identified three components of leadership: (1) influencing others, (2) providing direction, and (3) getting voluntary acceptance. There are specific leadership skills involved in mastering each of these components. Readers should recognize some of them as representing the basic foundation of management. That is true, but the use of these skills by leaders goes well beyond routine management.

Before moving on to the specific skills required for effective leadership, let us review several assumptions about leadership that will help to put it into perspective:

•   Leadership means influencing the behavior of others.

•   Leadership effectiveness relates to how successfully you influence others.

•   Leadership in management involves facilitating subordinate performance.

•   Leadership is a function of perception.

•   Leadership in management implies a mutual dependency.

•   Leadership is largely behavioral in nature.

•   Leadership behavior can be learned (Management Research Group, 2002).

Keep these statements in mind as we look at specific leadership skills and how they are implemented.

**■ Influencing Others**

Influencing others is essential, because how can one lead if others do not follow? A leader accomplishes his or her goals through the following of others. Leadership effectiveness relates to how successfully you influence those others. As an individual contributor, you just have to decide to work harder, longer, or smarter to improve performance. When you’re responsible for the performance of a group, the group is your destiny. They choose whether to act or not. When you become a leader, your influence goes up. The people who work for you pay attention to what you say and do. They adjust their behavior accordingly (Bock, 2006).

Skill: Managing Power/Influence

*Influence* is another term for *power*. To be effective, a leader must understand the uses and limitations of power. There are two primary types of power that leaders can use: position power and personal power (Management Research Group, 2002).

Position Power

Position power is that power or influence a person has by virtue of holding a particular position. It may be a management position or a position to which he or she is elected or appointed. There are four distinct types of position power.

*Coercive Power*—This is the power a person holds because he or she can affect another’s life negatively. He or she can fire that person, deny a pay raise, or deny a desired position within the organization. It can be seen as the “Do what I want or I’ll punish you” type of power.

*Reward Power*—The opposite of coercive power, this is the power a person holds because of his or her ability to reward another for doing what is wanted. The reward may be a pay raise, a promotion, or simply an elevation in status within the organization. Think of it as the “Do what I want and I’ll reward you” form of power.

*Legitimate Power*—The power that goes along with the official position. The boss can order others to do his or her bidding because “I told you to.” Use of this form of power should always be a last resort, because it does not produce willing followers.

*Connection Power*—It is possible to have influence over others because of a connection with someone in a position of power. People are apt to follow a person because of that person’s connections, or who they know (and the perception that these connections give a person influence).

Personal Power

Personal power is power that an individual possesses that is not directly connected to any organizational setting, although it can be used in such settings. There are three types of personal power.

*Expert Power*—Others will follow a person if that person is seen as an expert in a particular topic area. For example, a person who is not very computer literate is likely to defer to someone who is.

*Information Power*—It has long been recognized that having information that others do not have gives one influence over them. Knowing the financial status of an organization gives one an advantage over others in budget negotiations.

*Referent Power*—This is the least recognized, but often the most important, reason individuals follow a leader. It is because they wish to be like that leader, who is a role model for them. As highly visible members of the leadership team, executives are uniquely positioned to serve as role models (Robertson & Johnson, 2010). It is why individuals buy the same athletic shoes as their athletic heroes or why novices pattern themselves after their mentors.

Having any of these types of power carries a great deal of responsibility. It is incumbent on a leader to avoid abusing power at all times. To do that the leader must understand the power he or she has, its impact on others, and its limitations. While it would sometimes be tempting to overuse power, in the long run it is self-defeating.

Leaders must also be aware of the role perception plays in the use of power and influence. If the followers think that a leader has a certain type of power, that is the same as having the power. The degree of influence on the followers is the same. Many a manager has expressed an off-the-cuff opinion about something and been surprised later when subordinates took it as an order.

Skill: Motivation

To influence others—get them to do something—a leader must be able to motivate. That includes understanding and mastering motivation techniques. There are many such techniques, but to be successful a leader does not have to be a motivational speaker (such as those often seen at conventions and meetings), nor are high-powered pep talks necessary. Day-to-day interaction with those one seeks to motivate is much more important.

The most important aspect of motivating any group of people is knowing what motivates each of them. That means knowing them as individuals! Some respond favorably to an official approach, while others prefer a simple private word from the leader. While some need continual urging and even pushing, others work better if left alone. It is up to the leader to understand what motivates each one and then to address each one appropriately. It requires work and effort, but it will pay off.

A key element of successful motivation is knowing how and when to use rewards. There is an old saying that what gets rewarded gets repeated. Just as individuals respond differently to different types of rewards, they also respond differently in different situations. Formal recognition ceremonies have their place, but much of the time a simple thank you is more effective.

Lastly, motivation must be sincere and passionate. If followers do not perceive that the leader is motivated, they will not be. They look to the leader for guidance and energy and want her or him to exhibit passion and enthusiasm.

Skill: Communication

A leader cannot influence others without being able to let them know what is wanted. She or he must understand how to communicate with them. There are many means of communicating, including person-to-person; written communications; and, in this age of technology, electronic communications. To be effective, a leader needs to know which of them to use in any given situation and with any specific individual or group.

The leader must also understand when to communicate, including how often. Too little communication runs the risk of leaving followers unsure of the leader’s wishes. It also leaves them feeling uncertain and insecure. On the other hand, too much communication can be just as confusing. Nearly everyone has had the experience of receiving so many bits of communication that they either ignore them or take them less seriously than they should. It used to be some people sent too many memos. Today, it seems to be some send too many emails. It is human nature to tend to ignore them after a while.

Communication must be two-way to be effective. The leader must communicate with his or her followers but must also listen to them. It is not possible to know what is going on without feedback from the folks on the front line. Too many would-be leaders fail to recognize the importance of listening. That sends a signal to their followers that they do not value the input from others and/or do not care about anyone but themselves.

**■ Providing Direction**

Providing direction requires that the leader understand what it is that is desired. It demands knowledge of the goals to be attained. If the leader does not know where he/she wants to go, how can the followers? Leadership has the ability to align activities to ensure that individuals have the necessary resources, time, and energy to accomplish the organization’s goals. By defining and visibly emphasizing a vision that encourages and rewards learning and improvement, leadership at all levels of the organization “prompt its disparate elements to work together toward a common end” (Smith et al., 2013, p. 257). There is a passage in the story of *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll where Alice asks the Cheshire cat which path to take. He asks where she wants to go, and she says that she doesn’t know, to which the cat replies that it doesn’t matter which path she takes. Any group of people, particularly in a work situation, look to their leaders for direction. They want to be comfortable knowing that there is a reason for what they do and that someone in a position of authority has a vision.

Skill: Strategic Thinking

A leader must be able to see the big picture. That often means separating oneself from the day-to-day activities and visualizing a larger scenario. It is not always easy, given the many seemingly urgent events that occur every day. However, the leader must find a way to do so. In the case of a long-term care administrator, it means understanding the goals of the overall organization and making decisions within that context.

Strategic thinking can be thought of in terms of two dimensions, forward and sideways. Forward strategic thinking involves understanding what the long-range implications are of any decisions made today. What will those decisions mean 3 or 5 years in the future? Have all contingencies been considered? Sideways strategic thinking involves understanding what the implications of a decision are on others within or without the organization. Will a seemingly positive decision have negative consequences for other organizations or other units within the organization? All possible repercussions should be considered.

A successful leader needs to be able to understand abstract concepts. For example, the concept of aging in place has become generally accepted within long-term care. However, in its infancy, it was a pretty abstract concept. Those who were able to understand and embrace it easily had an advantage over those who could not. The phrase *thinking outside the box* has been much overused, but it applies in this case. A leader needs to be able to accept and understand unconventional ideas.

A leader must have a vision for the organization, work group, or other group of people over which he or she has influence. There are myriad definitions of an organizational vision. James Kouzes and Barry Posner (2007), in their outstanding book, *The Leadership Challenge*, describe a vision as “an ideal and unique image of the future” (p. 105). Another classic leadership text refers to a vision as “a target that beckons” (Bennis & Nanus, 1985, p. 89). It is not a mission statement (which says what the organization is), nor is it a prediction of what the organization is going to be. In its simplest terms, a vision is the leader’s concept of where the organization should be going.

The leader must not only have a clear vision, but be able to communicate that vision to others. If that is done well, the others in the group will adopt the leader’s vision as their own. That kind of buy-in goes a long way toward realization of the vision. Each vision is unique to both the leader and the organization, taking into account all of the internal and external factors affecting it. The leader must also realize that any vision has limitations. Unrealistic expectations can cause it to fail.

Skill: Planning

Leadership of an organization requires an ability to plan effectively. Strategic planning is not the same thing as strategic thinking, although they are obviously closely intertwined. Strategic thinking is an overall approach to leadership or management, while planning involves specific activities and skills. Planning entails understanding the environment in which the organization operates. It requires an ability to objectively assess the strengths and weaknesses of the organization.

Planning results in a written plan for the organization, clearly describing a direction for it. The plan can be seen as a blueprint for future actions and decisions. However, anyone who has been through a formal strategic planning process understands that the process is, in many ways, more important than the final plan. The process brings all of the organization’s stakeholders together and demands that they come to consensus concerning the future of the organization.

While the leader needs to guide the planning process, he or she should not get overly involved in the details of the process. The ultimate focus should be on outcomes, not the process itself. If designed properly, the process will largely take care of itself.

Skill: Managing Change

Nothing is as inevitable as change. Over time, particularly in a field as dynamic as long-term care, much change will occur. A successful leader must be able to manage that change as much as possible. Managing change does not necessarily mean avoiding or even controlling it. That may not be completely possible. However, a skillful leader can influence change and sometimes direct it to the advantage of the organization.

First, the leader must be able to recognize change as it happens, or preferably well before it happens. Most change affecting long-term care administrators comes from other sources—regulators, third-party payers, competitors, or even demographic changes. There is usually little that can be done to prevent such changes, even if they are unfavorable. However, much can be done to anticipate them and their impact. That means understanding the environment (see the preceding “Skill: Planning” section) and accepting that change will happen. A successful leader has the skill to take advantage of opportunities offered by external change and to position the organization accordingly.

Managing change requires that the leader make it a part of an overall strategy. Attempting to manage change without integrating it into an overall organizational strategy is risky in that it may lead to a fragmented response, or even the wrong response. Integrating change into strategy requires having a strategy that, in turn, means understanding the organization.

While most change comes from external factors, it can actually come from within. Occurrences such as reorganization, merger or other forms of cooperation with other organizations, or creation of new services all involve change. Generally, this type of change comes about as the result of planning efforts, but not always. Whatever its origin, internally initiated changes are easier to manage than external changes, meaning that the leader has more opportunity to control them.

The leader may sometimes want to actually create change for reasons other than the change itself. It can be a way of shaking up a group of followers—eliminating complacency, motivating them, or focusing their attention. A departmental reorganization might be an example of such created change.

Skill: Decision Making

Leaders are expected to make decisions. It is an elemental part of the role. Yet, many managers who would like to be considered leaders have difficulty doing so. There are many reasons for such reluctance to commit. They may not feel that they have enough information to make a decision, or that they have the authority to. Usually, however, it represents an unwillingness to take a stand and be held accountable. They fear making a mistake or being seen as wrong. That fear can spring from personal and professional insecurity or may be because the person involved recognizes the impact of his or her decisions on others and does not want to be responsible for that impact.

Whatever the reason, a leader cannot dodge making decisions and still be successful. A leader must be decisive. Inaction is like a vacuum. If the leader or manager does not make a decision, someone else will. Procrastination can undermine all leaders have built. That does not, however, mean that leaders must always make quick decisions. A successful leader understands the need to gather information and input to support the decision to be made. He or she also understands the implications of any decision. Most decisions affect some people more favorably than others and may negatively affect some. Thus, the decision may not be popular. Still, it must be made. A no-decision leaves everyone unhappy in most circumstances. Making decisions requires the leader to be a bit of a risk-taker. Successful leaders are comfortable making decisions and standing by them.

**■ Getting Voluntary Acceptance**

The third component of leadership is getting voluntary acceptance. It may be the most difficult of all, in that it requires convincing others to follow willingly, not by force or coercion. There are several separate, but related skills involved.

Skill: Enabling

Leadership in management involves facilitating subordinate performance. The job of a leader or manager is to accomplish organizational objectives through others. That is done more easily and effectively by enabling those others to do their jobs rather than controlling how they work. The first step in enabling is to set clear expectations—letting them know what is wanted and how it is to be measured. Paraphrasing the Cheshire cat quote referenced earlier, we might ask: “If you don’t know where you’re going, how will you know when you get there?”

Once expectations have been spelled out, it is time for someone to go to work. The leader cannot do it all, but must rely on others to perform most tasks. That involves delegation. It has been said that delegation is the sincerest form of trust (Pratt, 1997). Enabling others necessitates trusting them to do what is needed and to do it well, or at least adequately. Many would-be leaders are afraid to delegate (enable) for fear of having to live with the inadequate work of others. They do not trust them to come through.

Even though the leader has clearly set expectations, he or she should not micromanage the work processes by telling the others exactly how to do the work. While the need for such direction can vary, depending on the tasks and the abilities of workers to do them, a true leader encourages the staff to be creative and innovative. They are the ones most directly knowledgeable about the work they do and often have suggestions for improvement—if someone just asks them. It has been proven over and over that individuals grow both personally and professionally when given tasks that challenge them. A culture must be created where all employees can challenge something that does not make sense to them. This requires a high level of trust, communication, and freedom.

An important part of enabling others is providing them with the necessary support, which may range from simple moral support and encouragement to providing resources to assist them. It is the leader’s job to make those others successful.

Lastly, part of enabling others is staying out of their way. Be an enabler, not a barrier. Too often, managers inhibit the ability of their staff members to be creative and successful by placing barriers in their way. Whether those barriers are created by the enforcement of regulations and rules, failure to provide adequate resources, or simply micromanagement, they need to be avoided for a leader to be a successful enabler. We noted earlier that leadership in management implies a mutual dependency. What we mean by that is that managers or leaders and those they lead or manage must rely on each other. A failing of many managers that keeps them from becoming true leaders is that they are reluctant to depend on their followers or subordinates. They are afraid those others will not meet their expectations. It is something they need to get over if they are to be successful and effective as leaders.

Skill: Providing Feedback

Even if the leader or manager has followed all of the preceding enabling steps, the process is not complete without giving workers feedback telling them how well they have performed. They deserve to know if they have met expectations, and if not, why. That is how they will grow and improve. Giving feedback is the process of providing them with that information. It comes in two forms: positive feedback and negative (euphemistically called “constructive”) feedback. Positive feedback consists of telling them what they did right and praising them for it. Constructive feedback tells them what they can do better next time. Both are equally important. Most managers are more comfortable giving one than the other, but to be successful they must be able to do both.

Most prefer to give good news rather than bad news because they do not want to face the other person in a difficult situation. That is simply not fair to the person who wants to know how to improve on the job. However, there are those who are uncomfortable praising others, often because they are uncomfortable receiving praise. It is something they need to get over if they are to be successful leaders.

Skill: Problem Solving

Leaders are faced with problems to be solved. Without such problems, there often would be no need for leaders. Problem solving involves three steps, each with its own skill set. First, the leader must learn to recognize problems. The sooner potential problems can be identified, the sooner they can be solved, but that can be difficult. It means that the leader must be aware at all times of what is going on around him or her. Recognizing problems also entails knowing when a situation is not a problem. Understanding when to not act can be as important as knowing when to act. What may seem to be a problem—or is seen as a problem by someone else—may not really necessitate the involvement of the leader. A little benign neglect is sometimes a good thing.

Once problems have been recognized and identified, the next step is prioritizing them. Not all problems are of equal gravity, nor do they require equal actions. Some may be urgent but not serious, others serious but not urgent, and some both urgent and serious. The latter group obviously requires higher priority.

The final step is solving the problems. If the first two steps have been conducted properly, it may be the easiest step of all. Then, again, it may not. Few problems present single, obvious solutions. Rather, there may be several solutions with varying degrees of desirability. It is the leader’s job to seek the optimal solution—and hope it was the right one.

Many problems can be forestalled, at least at the level of involvement of the leader, if others in the organization are taught how to problem solve. It enables them and frees the leader up to deal with more important matters.

Skill: Conflict Resolution

At first glance, problem solving and conflict resolution might seem to be the same. They are similar but not necessarily identical and may require different skills. Whereas problem solving may include choosing among multiple solutions, there may not be actual conflict involved. Conflict occurs when there are two divergent forces at work. That may mean two or more individuals with differing views or separate work units with conflicting interests or agendas. No matter how legitimate the positions of those involved, there is a potential for discord, tension, and even hostility.

As with other forms of problem solving, the first step is to identify the nature of the conflict. This is particularly important in conflict resolution because many conflict situations grow out of misunderstandings. It is up to the leader to clarify what is at stake and where each of the opponent’s interests lies. That is a huge step toward resolving the conflict.

The most difficult part of conflict resolution is that it is usually unpleasant. It is likely that one party will be less than satisfied with the resolution chosen. It is the role of the leader to gain acceptance from them, at least to the degree possible, and to explain to all involved why a particular resolution was chosen.

Skill: Negotiation

Whereas conflict resolution usually involves resolving differences between two other parties, negotiation is the process of reaching an amicable agreement when there are differences between the leader and another party. It often comes into play when the leader or manager is representing the organization in interaction with another organization, but it may involve individuals in some instances.

The skill of negotiation requires understanding two key elements: what both parties want and what they are willing to give up. One of the most common situations requiring negotiation is wage and salary talks between an employer and an employee bargaining group (labor union). Each side attempts to estimate how far they can push the other. The better they can calculate the other party’s limits, the stronger their negotiating position. Another, usually less contentious, example of negotiation would include sharing of services by two or more organizations or facilities.

The goal of negotiation is to arrive at an agreement that is good for both parties. While both parties may not be equally satisfied with the final agreement, the negotiation is a success if both are comfortable living with it. Negotiation is a skill that can be best learned and refined through experience, although there are classes that can be taken to learn the basics.

Skill: Mentoring

An effective leader is a mentor or coach. He or she understands the importance of developing those around him or her, creating new leaders. It is a critical part of enabling them as well as getting and maintaining their commitment. Mentoring takes time and effort, but it is highly rewarding. It involves being able to recognize potential talent and expertise—and finding ways to develop that talent and expertise.

The goal of mentoring is to bring out the best in people and help them reach their full potential. Many organizations have implemented formal mentoring programs, whereby new or junior staff members are joined with more experienced colleagues to assist them and to help them to grow. However, informal mentoring can be every bit as successful and rewarding. Simply taking an interest in subordinates and their careers is a good start. People are a leader’s most valuable asset. Leadership success depends on an ability to surround oneself with an inner core of competent people who complement one’s particular leadership style and goals (Pollice, 2008).

Skill: Team Building

By definition, a leader needs a group of followers (or employees in the case of an administrator). However, converting that group into a team requires certain skills. One text defines a team as “a high-performing task group whose members are actively interdependent and share common performance objectives” (Francis & Young, 1992, p. 9). That definition nicely fits leadership within the context of management. It highlights the important aspects of an effective team: high-performing, actively interdependent, and sharing common objectives.

One of the responsibilities of a leader is to motivate the team members to all work together toward the common objective. This can be a daunting mandate because a team often comprises diverse members, each with their own strengths, weaknesses, and work styles. The team dynamics are also often complicated by internal disagreements and personal conflicts, making creation of team dynamics difficult.

Team building takes skill. The team leader must provide direction to the team and facilitate its activities toward common goals. If that is done well, the team members will see themselves as a team and take pride in being part of it. They will identify with the team as much as with their own separate roles. They will collectively share the challenges facing the team and celebrate its successes as a group. It is important here to note that the leader must fulfill dual roles, both as the leader of the team and as a team member. Balancing them may be difficult at times, but neither role can be ignored.

Skill: Managing Stress

Being a leader can be stressful. It goes with the position. Managers who cannot accept this concept are not likely to succeed as leaders. Yet, stress can be managed. Doing so begins with recognizing where the stress is coming from. It may be from the need to make difficult decisions, experiencing pressures on one’s time and activities from multiple sources, or the responsibilities of the position. In long-term care, as in other segments of health care today, much of the stress comes from having to do one’s job with inadequate resources.

The best way to manage such stress is to do the best you can and understand that you may not be able to please everyone or accomplish all that is expected of you. A leader should try to avoid expending time, worry, or effort on those things that he or she cannot control. There are plenty of other things to deal with. Also, a leader should try not to dwell on what has already happened. Look ahead. If a leader can do those things, he or she can relieve a lot of the stress in the job.

A leader needs to recognize that other members of the staff also experience stress. He or she needs to acknowledge that and do everything possible to help them deal with it.

**■ Gaining and Improving Leadership Skills**

The list of essential leadership skills given herein is lengthy and may, at first glance, appear to be difficult to achieve. That does not have to be the case. As noted earlier, leadership skills are not all that different from good management skills. They simply take those management skills to a higher level.

Remember the assumptions about leadership discussed earlier? Two of those assumptions were:

•   Leadership is largely behavioral in nature.

•   Leadership behavior can be learned.

These assumptions are important because they demonstrate first that people judge a leader’s skills by the actions they observe (how the leader behaves) and second that leaders can change the way they are seen (learning new behaviors and skills). Leadership behaviors are primarily learned and are often categorized as task oriented, relations oriented, and participative (Dana & Olson, 2007).

These skills can be learned in numerous ways. One can attend classes or seminars, read books and articles, and/or learn them through practice on the job. Actually, a combination of these methods is usually most effective and most practical. However, prior to embarking on a process of gaining or improving one’s leadership skills, there are a couple of steps that must occur: recognizing the need for improvement and assessing current skills.

Recognize the Need for Improvement

Before improvement can occur, there must be a realization that it is needed and possible. No one possesses leadership skills so completely that there is no room for improvement. Anyone can get better at some or all of the leadership skills we have discussed. Yet, there are always a few managers who think they are as good as they can get. They are destined to fail. If a leader wants to improve his or her leadership skills, he or she must make it a goal to go to the next level.

Assess Current Skills

Leaders must objectively assess their natural tendencies, behaviors, and how they approach people. Leadership is about being proactive, and that means continually testing one’s ideas and ideals (Llopis, 2013). Even when one has recognized that improvement is possible, it is difficult to assess one’s own skills and the areas where there is room for improvement. It is highly recommended that an independent, professional analysis be completed. There are many different ones available. While they vary in how the assessment is accomplished, most rely on some form of data input—a questionnaire or form—completed by the manager or leader. Some simply give the individual a format for self-assessment.

However, it is recommended that anyone sincerely interested in skills improvement look for a process that:

**1.**   Involves input both from the individual being assessed and from others within the workplace (boss, peers, subordinates). While self-assessment is valuable, a process that involves others has the advantage of balancing how the individual thinks she or he leads and how those others see her or him.

**2.**   Is conducted by a professional or organization with experience and expertise at conducting such assessments. The result—a foundation for self-improvement—is too important to trust it to an inadequate process.

**3.**   Is confidential and private. The assessment results should be intended for the use of the person being assessed, not for other purposes such as hiring or promotion. While the individual may choose to share the results, it should not be mandatory. Even when others have input into the process, confidentiality can be maintained if their contributions are summarized anonymously and presented in the aggregate. This is where an independent professional conducting the assessment is a big advantage.

**4.**   Goes beyond simply assessing skills and includes an individualized action plan for skills improvement.

**5.**   Provides individualized assistance and tutoring for each person who completes the process.

An assessment process that includes all of these elements will be more expensive than some others, but it will be money well spent. And believe it or not, this initial assessment is often the most difficult part of a self-improvement program. If conducted well, it can lead to specific actions for skills development.

While there has been ongoing discussion and disagreement about whether leaders are born or made, there is much evidence supporting the latter. Nearly anyone can lead. Some will do it better than others—and will be more successful—but that is relative. Leadership skills can be developed, maintained, or improved. It just requires a bit of commitment and effort.

**■ Summary**

Leadership is critical in any organization. This is particularly true in long-term care organizations, given the fast-paced nature of the field. As has been so well documented throughout this text, it is a field that is undergoing nearly continual transformation. It is a situation crying out for leadership (that is not to imply that there is currently no leadership, just that more will always be needed). If providers are to be competitive, they need leaders who can carry them to the next level of success.

**■ Vocabulary Terms**

The following terms are included in this chapter. They are important to the topics and issues discussed here and should become familiar to readers. Some of the terms are also found in other chapters but may be used in different contexts. They may not be fully defined herein. Thus, readers may wish to seek other supplementary definitions.

charisma

coercive power

communication

competent

conflict resolution

connection power

decision making

enabling

expert power

feedback

forward-looking

honest

influence

information power

inspiring

leader

leadership

legitimate power

managing change

managing stress

mentoring

motivation

negotiation

personal power

planning

position power

power

problem solving

referent power

reward power

strategic thinking

team building

vision

**■ Discussion Questions**

The following questions are presented to assist you in understanding the material covered in this chapter. They tend to be general but lend themselves to detailed answers, which can be found in the chapter.

**1.**   What are the basic components of leadership?

**2.**   What are the characteristics of leaders most commonly desired by people?

**3.**   What skills are needed to be a successful leader?

**4.**   How does one go about learning or improving leadership skills?

**5.**   Why is managing organizational change important?

**6.**   What are some barriers to successfully changing an organization’s culture?

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