



WHERE TO BEGIN

First Steps to Physician
Engagement and Leadership

A complimentary whitepaper from



ctileadership.com



FIRST STEPS TO PHYSICIAN ENGAGEMENT & LEADERSHIP

Healthcare industry pundits and executives largely agree that positive clinical transformation will not happen unless physicians are actively engaged and willing to help lead the way to necessary changes. As the experts who determine what care patients need and, in concert with nurses and other allied health professionals, must provide it, physicians are essential to achieving the goals of the triple aim. OK, we have identified this important component to success. But how do we make it happen? How does an organization that relies on dozens – to potentially hundreds – of physicians (physicians who are already working at or beyond capacity) change the mindset and habits of those physicians and align them to a common goal?

THE ENGAGEMENT-LEADERSHIP RELATIONSHIP

First, let’s be sure we all understand what we mean by engagement. Physicians are, for the most part, dedicated professionals who rightly consider themselves to be quite engaged with their patients already. By which they mean that they are actively involved in their care and committed to their patients’ well-being. Physician engagement at the organizational level is similar – active involvement in, and commitment to, the organizations mission and success.

Nowadays that usually means sincere desire to participate in achieving the triple aim of improving health for whole populations of patients, improving individual patient experience and satisfaction, while eliminating waste and containing costs. So, physician engagement is largely about broadening physicians’ view of their role – from that of providing care, one patient at a time, to one of assisting in the design of a better healthcare delivery system across

the board.

With the latest race to acquire practices and employ physicians, organizational leaders are coming to the realization that employment does not equal engagement. Engagement with a particular institution means loyalty, active commitment to its mission, and alignment with its values. When physicians are engaged, they feel like they fit within an organization, both emotionally and culturally, and they believe that the organization operates in a way that allows them to perform optimally.

Leadership, of course, goes beyond individual engagement – and even empowerment – and involves influencing others to accomplish specific mission and objectives. Organizational leaders perform many managerial responsibilities, such as determining strategy, ensuring quality, and delegating tasks. Even more important, they define the culture, build trust, foster effective communication, and inspire others.

Engagement is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition of leadership. It is possible to be engaged and not lead, but it is not possible to lead without first being engaged.

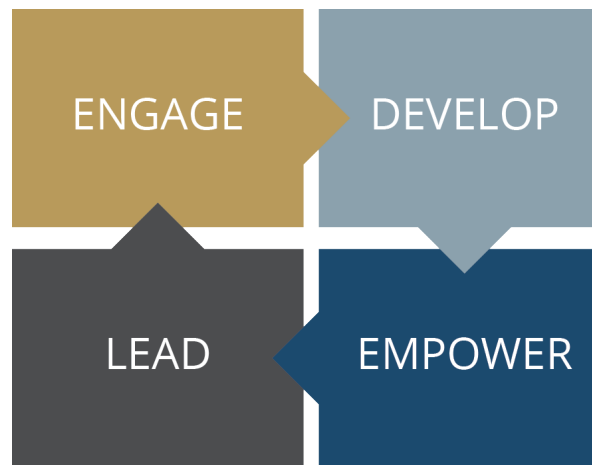


Figure 1: Progression: Engagement to Leadership



STEP BY STEP

To begin a successful physician engagement and leadership journey is probably easier than you would assume. We offer the following strategy as a guide to help.

1. Assess Current State

It is impossible to get anywhere without first knowing where you want to go, as well as how far and in what direction that destination is from where you are now. Most healthcare organizations have long since identified their goals, largely based on those dictated by the Affordable Care Act's triple aim. And most have quickly learned that dictating to their physicians what and how they need to change is ineffective. Before executives can begin to transform their organizations, they must first ensure that their physicians are ready, willing, and able to implement necessary changes, which means they must be fully engaged. And that means first answering the question of how engaged they are today.

Today's healthcare environment is such that is unusual not to find most of these symptoms present in most organizations and recognizing the problem is an encouraging first step to successful transformation. The next step is to acknowledge that without physician engagement, there will be no physician leadership and little, if any, progress toward transformation.

Fortunately, it is possible to improve engagement and cultivate leadership skills simultaneously. In fact, because feelings of reduced autonomy and perceived lack of respect by administrators are leading causes of physician stress and burnout, inviting physicians to become more active leaders is an excellent way to engage and empower them.

2. Secure Buy-In

• **Define Focus Areas:** The quantity and variety of improvements most healthcare organizations want to make can be overwhelming. Physician leadership is likely important to all of them, but identifying the most important and focusing on those first will make it easier to get started and lay the groundwork for success.

• **Share Your Vision:** Physicians are thinkers who are trained to solve problems, not merely follow instructions. They need to understand not only what you are trying to do, but why you are

To assess whether physician engagement is lacking, check for these symptoms:

- Misaligned goals between executive management and physicians
- Anxiety about the future
- Confusion about organization's strategic objectives
- Resistance to change and desire to preserve the status quo
- Physicians limiting their involvement to clinical work
- Limited adoption of evidence-based best practices
- Providers unaware of, or indifferent to, financial implications of their actions
- Reluctance to be involved in improvement plans
- High physician turnover rates
- Notable variation in practices and outcomes
- Lack of participation in key meetings and committees



trying to do it. Share those top priorities and the reasons they are so important, preferably in the context of patient care.

- **Rally the Troops:** Acknowledge that you cannot do this alone and ask for help from current administrative and clinical leaders, including as many physicians as possible. This will immediately send a message of respect and inclusion and will get those physician thinkers thinking of ways to help you succeed.

- **Identify Key Influencers:** Engagement and leadership development are ongoing processes whose impact increases over time. Think about physicians in your organization who are widely respected and can help influence others and invest in them first.

3. Understand Physician Leadership

Physician leadership is about behavior, not a specific role, title, or function. Physician leaders provide purpose and vision to inspire, engage, and influence people to collaboratively deliver tangible results. The shift from physician to physician leader looks like this:

This paradigm change is significant and requires transformative learning, which is defined as “a deep, structural shift in basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions.”¹ For physicians to become leaders, they must literally change their frames of reference by critically reflecting on their assumptions and consciously defining their worlds in new ways. And isn’t this exactly what we need to transform clinical care and meet the goals of the triple aim?



Figure 2: Five Domains of Physician Leadership

Physician	Physician Leader
Autonomous care provider	Collaborative care team leader/member
Practice advocate	Organization or team advocate
1:1 interactions with instant gratification	1: N interactions with delayed gratification
Reactive philosophy	Proactive philosophy
Decider/doer	Delegator/planner/designer
Knowledge holder	Knowledge coordinator
Resistant to change	Embrace and lead change
Conflict and risk avert	Skilled negotiator, win-win producer
Follows procedures and protocols	Sets vision and energizes others
Plays not to lose	Plays to win

For true transformation to occur in healthcare, physician leadership development must not be treated as an elective. It has to be considered the core curriculum upon which all other learning, development, and change depends. Healthcare executives must make a serious commitment to cultural change and integrated leadership, providing the resources needed to equip physicians with the perspective, knowledge, and skills that they did not acquire in medical school.

Each organization will have its own leadership success profile based on its specific needs. A good framework for thinking about and organizing success profiles is to begin with purpose as the core around which the other crucial qualities



Look for a leadership development partner with:

- Flexibility and willingness to align to your culture, values and strategic goals
- Dedicated to developing physician leaders and dyad leadership teams in organizations similar to yours
- Strong track record of success demonstrable through case studies, references, and repeat business
- Leadership development model that can be customized to fit your specific needs and culture
- Willingness to get in the trenches with your physicians to understand their world and to coach them effectively
- Applied learning approach aligned to your strategic objectives
- Examples of ROI and measurable improvements over time

are organized and viewed. We find it helpful to distinguish between human doings and human beings, which are similar to what people commonly think of as hard and soft skills.

4. Find a Partner

Closing the gap between physicians' strictly clinical orientation to organizational engagement and leadership requires employing a rigorous leadership development program, preferably one with a track record of success and tangible results. A weekend conference or occasional webinar is not going to achieve sustainable results. Although the idea of spending time and money at a time when both are in short supply is understandably frightening to some, those who take the bold step now will find it paying big dividends in the years to come. Administrators must recognize that leadership development is not about spending money, but investing money in one of the organization's most important assets, its physicians.

Also, do not be afraid to apply any additional criteria that is important to your organization. Sometimes small, even idiosyncratic, details can make all the difference to your success. A good leadership

development partner will want to immerse themselves in your organization's history, culture, previous or current development programs, your vision, challenges, strategic goals and any concerns or context that you think is relevant.

5. Anticipate-to-Avoid Failure

Stories about leadership development programs that accomplished little to nothing abound in the healthcare industry – and elsewhere. Before embarking on one, it is wise to consider what could go wrong. According to McKinsery,² the four common and avoidable mistakes that companies make in implementing leadership development programs are:

- **Overlooking context:** training initiatives assume that one size fits all
- **Decoupling reflection from real work:** teaching leadership skills in isolation rather than tying to real on-the-job projects
- **Underestimating mind-sets:** reluctance to address the root causes of why people act the way they do

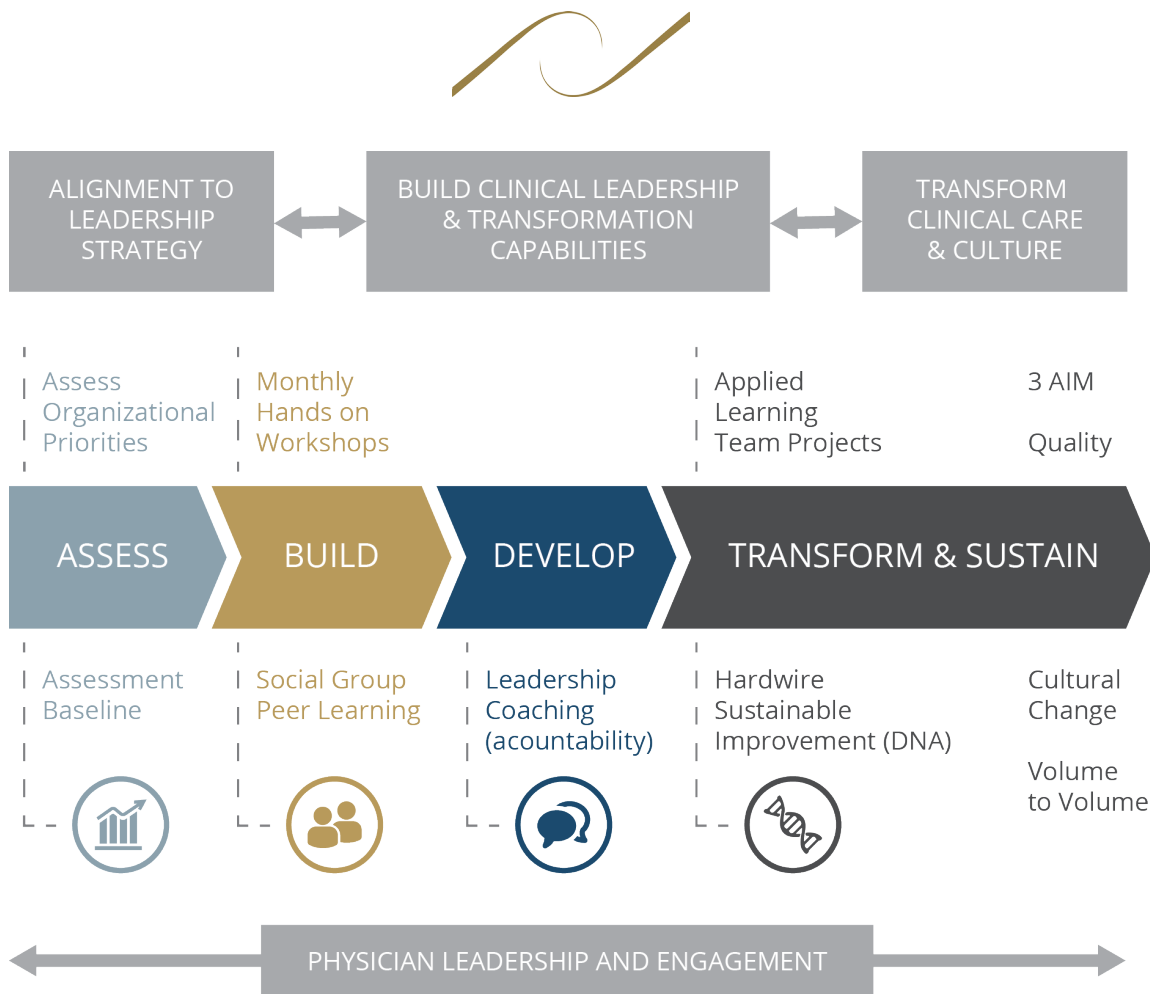


Figure 3: Road map for Physician Leadership Development Program

- **Failing to measure results:** do not set quantifiable targets or monitor impact over time

The time to ensure that you don't fall into any of these pitfalls is before your leadership development program begins. Use these four points as a checklist and confirm that these components are built into the program design from the beginning. You and your leadership development partner should have a clear and common vision of what you should expect, including meaningful metrics, for each stage of the leadership journey. The following road map illustrates a path to transforming clinical care and culture through physician engagement and leadership development.

6. Personalize

When it comes to making substantive change, truly engaging physicians, and developing impactful leaders, there is no such thing as one size fits all. It is crucial to be mindful of differences between individuals and their needs.

The primary leadership development focus for a group of oncologists might be in people-related areas, such as communication, relationship building, and conflict management. Emergency department physicians, on the other hand, might need to focus more on strategy areas, such as quality and process improvement, productivity and efficiency and customer/patient focus.



Physician Groups' Strengths and Development Areas: Similar Groups, Different Needs

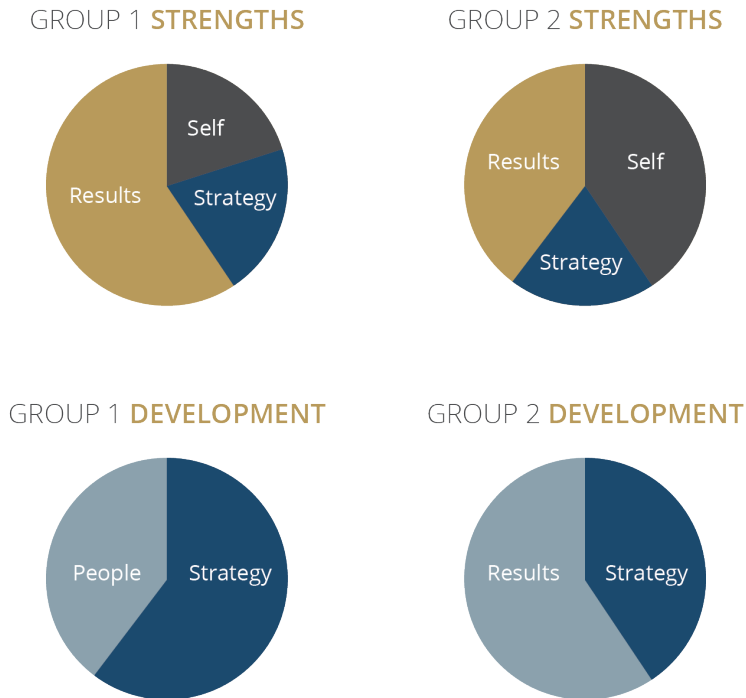


Figure 4: Comparison of physician groups strengths and development areas

In our work developing physician leaders at hospitals, large health systems, and physician group practices nationwide, we see great variety in the needs of physicians from one cohort to the next, which we measure according to the five domains mentioned earlier: leading with purpose and leading for strategy, self, people, and results.

As illustrated by the following example from two previous physician groups, needs can be quite different and it would be a grave error to begin without first confirming the strengths and development areas of each group.

7. Emulate, Assess, Adapt

Physician engagement and leadership, like any important initiative, will require some trial and

error. Often, it is best to begin by focusing on a small number of priorities. Even one area, such as a single department or strategic objective/project is a good way to begin and learn what works best.

In deciding what area, and which physicians, to begin with, we advocate selecting for an area and/or group with a high probability of success. Some executives fear that this route will result in a biased sample and exaggerate the chances of expanded success throughout the organization. However, our experience has shown that success begets success and that the example of sincere engagement and influential leadership impacts the organization quickly and in myriad positive ways.

So, begin with a group of physicians who are likely



to be receptive to the idea of truly engaging and developing their leadership skills and focus on strategic objectives or project that can feasibly be accomplished in a reasonable period of time and with available resources.

Once you have success with one group and/or area, you can – and should – capitalize on that success to formulate best practices that you can then emulate for another. Keeping in mind, of course, the lesson of Step 6: Personalize. A new group should be assessed for strengths and areas of development before you begin so that you can adapt best practices accordingly. Also, continue to monitor and measure, basing all conclusions and decisions on achieved results.

CONCLUSION

The task of changing behaviors, much less the mind-sets, of any group of individuals can be daunting. When it comes to physicians, who are so accomplished, intelligent, and independent, the very idea can be overwhelming. Many healthcare executives still see the challenge of physician alignment as absurdly difficult, if not absolutely impossible. Happily, it is neither.

It won't happen overnight, but physicians can engage, and lead, more expediently and effectively than commonly expected. By following the simple steps outlined here, you will soon be ready to tap into an abundant resource of effective change agents and allies – your physicians.

ABOUT CTI

CTI's mission is to transform healthcare through leadership, strategy, and innovation. We provide rigorous, experiential learning that is custom-fit for each client, resulting in improved performance and long-term succession planning. Our Physician

What characteristics make good candidates for physician leaders?

When beginning a physician leadership training program, it makes sense to select the doctors who will make the most of what they learn. While almost any physician can improve leadership skills, there are some characteristics that help identify the most promising candidates. Those qualities include:

- High EQ - emotional intelligence
- Possibilities thinking - open to new ideas and better solutions
- Integrity and trust - good individual values align with good organizational values
- Skillful communicator - not flashy, just effective
- Triggers the best instincts in others - makes others want to do the right thing
- Lifts the mood of others - optimism is infectious
- Interested in what's best for the institution and the patient - no substitute for this
- Good judgment - beyond the clinical
- They create strong authentic connections built on trust

Leadership Institute uses an evidence-based approach to empower physicians with the skills to inspire their teams, collaborate with peers and administrators, and deliver superior clinical and business outcomes. For more information, please visit physicianleadership.org or call 813-333-1401.



Physician Leadership Training and Development Services from CTI's Physician Leadership Institute™ have earned the exclusive endorsement of the American Hospital Association.

Citations

1. "Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning" by Jack Mezirow, Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1991
2. "Why Leadership Development Programs Fail" by Pierre, Gurdigan, Thomas Halbeisen, Kevin Lane; McKinsey; mckinsey.com/global-themes/leadership/why-leadership-development-programs-fail