



# Contrarian **Edge**

## Notes to the New Leader

The good news is that you have a leadership job in an American hospital. The bad news is that you have a leadership job in an American hospital.

As turbulence and turmoil continues in American healthcare, managers find themselves each day in a new environment, taking over new leadership assignments, or redefining their role.

A nurse leader at an award-winning hospital trying to describe the need for new thinking put it this way: "We can no longer manage and lead by doing our best. We must do other than our best."

### Connect with people

1. Get to know staff as people first, then as contributors. Ask people what needs fixing and what decisions need to be made. Write down what you hear and start a to-do list. Post the group's list in the department.
2. Start your own departmental recognition and reward program, including all staff and shifts. Most work groups are reward starved, so consider frequent recognition and celebration programs.
3. Underpromise and over-deliver on all commitments to staff.
4. Make frequent rounds, all shifts, including weekends. Bring pizza. Ask what needs fixing for customers. When customers are happy, staff is happy. And vice versa—a double helix interaction.
5. People are mired in myopia. Explain the big picture you bring and why they should be excited to go after defined goals. Get your vision down to one page, and use language an eighth grader understands.

6. Make service your war cry. Unless an organization produces what customers want and need, there's no excuse for the organization to exist. Dispirited organizations have little clarity about customer expectations or why meeting them is essential to job joy.

### Lead by example—there isn't any other kind

1. Be a moral leader. Stand for the values that great people have. Let there be no tolerance of mediocrity. Set dates, define quality outputs, get people on quarterly performance plans, and manage by objectives. As Drucker wrote: "One either manages by objectives or one does not manage."
2. Never disparage anything your predecessor did. It doesn't contribute anything and only slows down the dialog.
3. If not already done, get agreements laid out between those you report to as to what is expected and how your performance will be measured.
4. Assess your layer of direct staff reports. Do they have the skills they need? Are they able to effectively work with you, or will they need to be replaced? You can win with winners; you'll never win with losers.
5. Spin nonessentials out of your job. That will be about half of what your predecessor was doing.
6. Make decisions on people matters or hard-to-correct areas slowly; then take rapid action. Get things moving. One hospital president began with a 20-page to do list. She whittled it down to 15 pages by the end of her first two weeks and 10 pages by the end of the first month.

7. Set the pace. If you require things in less time, they'll get done in less time.

### Take care of number one

1. Reconfigure your family life. Where and when will quality time happen? Get everyone to sign on, and then keep your commitments at home. Jobs come and go—family is forever.
2. Get in shape; knock off bad habits. Interestingly, a physically active leader is rated as more powerful by staff. Jog into work periodically. Be seen walking circuits around the hospital as a lunchtime constitutional—take a small army with you like Gideon circling Jericho.
3. If it doesn't feel right, don't do it. There's a lot of judgment called for in your job. Never let your brain overrule your gut. Have some doubts? Reference your values.
4. Grow thicker skin and a stronger spin because you're going to be criticized, and you need to stand up for yourself. Don't have an ego crisis every time somebody finds fault with something.

There's lots more that needs to be done, of course, but recognizing that the old path no longer serves is half the battle. The day of the manager is over. The day of being a leadership commando is here! +

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