

FILLING THE LEADERSHIP GAP: CREATING YOUR ORGANIZATION'S NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

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Workforce shortages are significantly impacting the healthcare industry. When we consider that the population is growing and people are living longer, it's brewing the perfect healthcare storm: a surplus of patients and a scarcity of providers. Healthcare's constantly changing landscape has created numerous challenges for leaders, but the workforce shortage is especially problematic because it deepens challenges the industry is already facing, such as margin pressure, changing payment models, employee burnout and the need to evolve to remain competitive in the changing healthcare landscape. What healthcare organizations need now is strong leadership — but, as the workforce shortage grows and current executives retire, they are positioned to leave an ever-widening leadership gap in their wake. To meet these challenges, healthcare organizations must transform their approach to leadership today to secure the leaders of tomorrow.

Attract and Nurture Talent Early

To fill the pipeline of future leaders, healthcare organizations are partnering with health sciences, nursing and medical schools to create immersive internships that provide hands-on clinical training. These partnerships allow organizations to fill temporary vacancies, and many prospective nurses, physicians and other healthcare professionals get to preview an organization's culture and see what it would be like to work there. Healthcare leaders can use these partnerships to identify high performers and get to know them. This can include giving them a leadership skills assessment to identify future leaders. For the students, knowing they have what it takes to become a leader provides positive reinforcement for them to pursue that goal.

After hiring new, qualified talent, organizations must find a way to keep them and, over time, turn them into future-focused, change-ready leaders. Recognizing that younger generations of healthcare professionals typically do not intend to spend 10 years with one organization, leaders need to give new hires a reason to stay for the long term. Advancement programs that carry new hires from entry level through leadership level, mentorship programs that pair new hires with experienced employees, and training buddy programs that encourage peers to complete certification classes together all incentivize new hires to stay by creating powerful ties to the organization and its people.

Build a Team to Take Your Job

While financial results and clinical outcomes are important metrics for evaluating performance, healthcare organizations must prioritize the development of others as a key responsibility for any leadership position. Current leaders should approach their teams' development as though they are trying to find and develop their replacement. This involves taking the time to show the team what a leadership role demands; the team needs to understand the transition from an individualized role where they are responsible for their own work to a management role where they are responsible for other people. Consistent learning opportunities that expose the team to new experiences boost the team members' understanding of the role they currently play in the organization and build their confidence in pursuing leadership roles in the future.

To start developing team members for a leadership role, it helps to get to know them: how they learn, how they work, their strengths, their weaknesses and what they want out of their careers. Understanding team members on an individual basis helps leaders craft personalized professional development plans that play upon individual strengths, give practical solutions to addressing weaknesses, and ingrain the skills, temperament and knowledge necessary to be effective and strategic future leaders.

Understand Your Market

Healthcare leaders can anticipate and deflect the effects of the leadership gap by identifying key areas of the organization where leadership will be most needed in the future. Assess the market to see what community needs are not being met in the current setup and what needs are expected to grow in the future. Leaders should ask themselves what skills or specialties consumers have access to that their organization does not provide and consider what value and experiences their organization can bring to consumers that aren't readily available in the market.

For example, if your market is lacking in exceptional pediatric care, leaders should develop a strategy to attract, retain and develop employees to address that community need. Leaders can partner with community resources or other organizations to build their capacity in a specific area or bring in speakers who can provide skill building and proactive education to teams. By thoroughly understanding both the needs of the community and your organization's own strengths, leaders can anticipate future leadership needs and be ready for them.

As the population continues to grow and live longer, healthcare organizations will be under significant pressure to meet increased demands. By nurturing talent early, building teams with the intention of advancing them, and making leadership a capability for creating other leaders, healthcare organizations can proactively address the leadership gap.

Key Takeaways

To ensure your healthcare organization has the leadership it needs to remain successful into the future:

Think differently.

Reframe your mindset on leadership to include developing your own replacement.

Plan differently.

Audit your organization to determine where it excels and what it's missing and to identify future leadership gaps.

Act differently.

Build a positive workplace culture that incentivizes high-performing talent to stay for the long term.



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