Creating and Sustaining Academic Pediatric Leadership Teams

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How does a new leader create the leadership teams that will allow their organization to be successful? Each of us have served as a members of leadership teams in our academic work—some successful and some less effective. What makes a good team? How can we create and lead great leadership teams to create success? As a start, it is important to clarify what type of team we are building. The original definition of a "team" was "two or more animals harnessed to pull a heavy load." Probably not what we are aspiring to in our academic work. Another common usage of "team" is "a group of players to compete in a game or sport." Again, not necessarily on target when building an academic leadership team. Our concept of building successful leadership teams is that a "team" is "two or more people working together to accomplish a goal".

What factors may lead to an ineffective team. In his book, *Overcoming the five dysfunctions of a team*, Lencioni offers five reasons leading to team-failure: absence of trust, fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability and inattention to the results. Failure of a team to work collectively toward a goal really starts with members trusting the leader and each other, as well as understanding the goals. Trust among team members allows conflicting views to be aired and considered safely and team members be held accountable. It is the responsibility of the leader to choose team members who will be committed to the goals of the team, as well as to sustaining that commitment. Finally, the leader and the team members must not only find a way to reach a goal but to evaluate and sustain the goal if it was successfully achieved.

In considering highly successful teams outside of academic medicine, one often thinks of sports analogies, but other examples come to mind, such as the London Philharmonic orchestra, a police swat team, or the Apollo 11 mission. What commonalities do these teams have? They have highly ambitious and talented members all with unique knowledge, expertise and experience, they are aligned to a common vision, they trust other team members and the team leader to perform at their best, they hold themselves and each other accountable. We should think about these factors as we create our academic leadership teams.

The role of the leader in constructing a leadership team cannot be overemphasized. Creating effective teams takes thought and strategy. Take for example, Abraham Lincoln's cabinet choices as he faced the then greatest challenge our country had faced. His cabinet was described as a "Team of Rivals" by Doris Kearns Goodwin. Yet despite the apparent political and philosophical differences, the group helped Mr. Lincoln survive the crisis of the civil war. What were the qualities that led to their success? His cabinet were his key competitors for the

presidency, and they held each other highly accountable. Each cabinet member had skills that were key for running the government. He allowed conflict among the cabinet members then gained commitment. He held them accountable and replaced those who didn't measure up after giving an opportunity to succeed. He articulated the key principles in which the cabinet was expected to act, and most importantly he gained their trust over time.

Lincoln's cabinet was aligned in the desire to win the war. Why is team alignment and empowerment so critical?4 An unempowered team is like a group of rowers whose oars are too short and who aren't able to move forward, regardless of how hard they try. An unempowered team may work hard, but it generates wasted energy and does achieve results. Another form of team failure is nonalignment. Nonalignment is when the team is empowered but unaligned. An example of this situation might be a rowing crew in which each rower is rowing out of synch with the other rowers. The boat would be buffeted back and forth and not likely to move forward effectively. An unempowered but unaligned team creates chaos and conflict. I suspect we have all seen this type of team. An aligned and empowered team has a shared energy and can move forward to the finish line, like a winning rowing crew, with less wasted energy and better results.

As a new leader, Department Chairs have the opportunity and often necessity to build leadership teams. Examples include Vice Chairs, Division Chiefs, promotion committees, finance committees, strategic planning committee, education leaders, etc. New Division chiefs also must have a division leadership team that includes clinical operations, education programs and research operations. All new leaders must determine what teams have the highest priority. For a new chair who is an internal candidate, the creation of leadership teams often involves realigning existing teams, with or without changing team members. Building and aligning the department's leadership teams are absolutely critical for the success of the department and for your success. For this reason, establishing the department's leadership teams should be done deliberately and with much forethought. In considering how you build a new department's leadership teams, it is important that your leadership teams are aligned with your vision and the vision of the department.

The selection of vice department chairs, for example, is a unique opportunity for a newly appointed departmental chair. The role of vice chair can be extremely helpful to a chair; however, previous surveys have indicated that chairs frequently didn't utilize or know how to utilize their vice chairs. The vice chair often is expected to speak for the chair. It is therefore very important that vice chairs share the leadership philosophy and values of the chair. For vice chairs to be effective, they must be empowered to speak for their area of oversight. Choosing vice chairs also may be a valuable retention appointment for leaders who are seeking more responsible leadership roles.

What are the qualities that contribute to being a good team player. Lencioni suggests looking for leaders who are humble and hungry, as well as possessing "people smarts". He posits that these three virtues, when combined, make an excellent team player. While no one may be perfect in all three, he suggests that humility is the most important attribute. Humility suggests emphasizing others over oneself without arrogance. Hungry people are self-motivated and diligent. "People smarts" refers to having good judgement about working with people. Imbalance in any of these attributes can lead to dysfunctional teams. When building leadership teams, looking for these qualities is critical. If one of the attributes is less strong, coaching is most likely to be able to enhance the attribute of "people smarts" than it is for humility and hunger.

How does a leader build a successful academic leadership team in her/his organization? The most important connection between a leader and their team is TRUST. For the leaders in an organization reporting to you, they must trust their leader. If you are a new Chair or Division Chief, this takes time and patience. Trust can be built

by listening to your team leaders, including your leaders in developing priorities for the organization, setting and making visible your goals (early wins are very helpful), assessing skill sets to allow team members to be successful, making changes that are based on principles and importantly, being transparent in your decision processes.

Once built, how can a chair or division chief support their team for success. First it is important that the leader be accessible to the team and recognize the accomplishments of the teams. For a team to be effective and motivated, they must be given important tasks to accomplish. The leader must model accountability and follow through. In team meetings, the leader should spend the majority of time listening and not dominate the discussion. As team members demonstrate success, the team should be allowed to address issues of increasing importance. The leader should continuously develop the skills and knowledge of their leadership teams. Furthermore, the leader also should herself/himself grow as the team members grow in their leadership skills.

Success is rarely achieved alone. Developing strong departmental leadership teams should be a priority for any leader.

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