



Developing a Leadership Pipeline

How to transform your top-to-bottom leadership to boost organizational performance.

Contrary to the phrase that someone is a “born leader,” expertise and experience are hard won and hard earned. It takes years of working in the trenches to gain the insights, knowledge and skills of a seasoned veteran, with most leaders needing to be developed along the way. The same holds true in healthcare, where employees at every level need to continually develop to reach their potential and, for some, to step into leadership roles.

It starts at the top with strong, effective leadership, which trickles down throughout the organization. Solid leadership at all levels sets the foundation for building a strong company culture and, ultimately, having an engaged workforce.

As **Eric Scharber**, Principal at Simione Healthcare Consultants, points out, healthcare is, at its core, a people business. “We’re not selling widgets or devices or something tangible,” says Scharber. “We are people taking care of people. To do that well, you have to have an engaged workforce.” Scharber should know—he leads talent acquisition and employee retention efforts for the home care and hospice industry through Exact Recruiting, a Simione Talent Solution.

In fact, leadership development at every level plays a critical role for home health and hospice organizations. Why? It's not always possible to simply go out and "hire" new leaders when you need them. To thrive, your organization must focus on developing new leaders and continually investing in existing ones.

Plus, there's the whole "talent gap" issue. In the healthcare industry, a huge chasm exists in the number of highly seasoned leaders when compared to the demand in the space. That gap is likely to widen with the growing demand and heightened expectations among providers, patients, and payers.

For example, according to the most recent **National Nursing Workforce Study**, the average age of Registered Nurses is 51. Other statistics predict that many of those 55 years or older are planning to retire in five years. The result? A huge portion of the workforce will be exiting while a huge influx of new nurses will be entering it.

"This creates a talent gap in leadership," notes Scharber. "What organizations better be doing right now is developing their workforce from the top through the middle and even with the newbies. This will keep the organization thriving and growing."

Of course, leadership development takes time, resources, and sustained effort. But when you focus on this, you create a leadership pipeline filled with outstanding employees ready to step up and move the organization forward. Think of it as top-to-bottom succession planning.

"Companies are successful to the extent that they have leaders at all levels of the organization. Any institution that invests in the development of leaders at all levels is going to get ahead of its competition."

-Noel Tichy
*Director of the Global Leadership Program
University of Michigan Business School*

When it comes to cultivating an engaged workforce, it's worth dissecting what successful companies do to retain staff—especially in light of the healthcare industry's high turnover rate. One of the biggest retention factors lies in company culture—and the owner or CEO is the driving force. "Having a company culture that promotes staff engagement and gets people excited about working there generally yields greater job satisfaction," notes Scharber.

As you create this engaged workforce and start developing leaders at all levels, they'll get behind your core values and help power your mission. "Good leadership translates into good company culture, which translates into good organizational results," says Scharber, noting that as your leadership abilities grow, both your outcomes and your bottom-line performance will improve.



So How Do You Transform Leadership from Average to Amazing?



The first piece of building this leadership pipeline, says Scharber, is to put talent development at the top of your priority list. “This requires C-suite engagement. It can’t just be a human resources issue,” Scharber points out. “Senior leadership needs to develop their leaders at the top to then develop other leaders in layers below.”

To catapult your organization to higher levels of performance, Scharber offers these tips:

1. Embrace the Talent Development Timeline

Having placed nearly 2,000 people over the last 15 years, Scharber observes an impatient mindset within the industry. “I’ve seen countless times where organizations hire somebody and then just three months later, say the person isn’t working out and start over with the hiring process.” Organizations often look for the perfect candidate who checks all the boxes and can hit the ground running with no training. But that’s usually not an option. More common? Organizations find someone who meets most of the criteria but needs some training. That’s where talent development comes into play. “This is not a one- or two-month scenario; this is a long-term process,” says Scharber, noting it might take 6-12 months before an employee is where you need them to be. This means investing time and resources into developing your team every day. If done properly, you will improve your team overall, as well as improve your ability to retain your staff. In a recent national survey of over 400 employees spanning three generations (Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millennials), 70% of the respondents indicated that job-related training and development opportunities influenced their decision to stay at their job.

2. Be Flexible in How You Manage People

Ditch the one-size-fits-all management approach. Leaders must be flexible in how they manage people based on their staff’s needs. Some people need to be challenged, while others need to be nurtured. This can vary across generations, from Baby Boomers to Generation X to Millennials. Keep in mind that, by 2025, nearly 75 percent of the workforce is going to be Millennials. How you treat them, manage them, and communicate with them will differ from the approach you use with older workers.

3. Learn What Motivates Staff

Discovering what your employees' goals are and what drives them can be as simple as having real conversations with them. "With your top-level leaders, especially the CEO position, half of the job is like being a Counselor-in-Chief trying to understand your people and what drives and motivates them," says Scharber. While some people aim to climb the corporate ladder, not everyone wants to rise to the top. And that's a good thing, notes Scharber. Why? "Your organization needs those worker bees and frontline folks." Armed with these insights, you can manage employees differently.

4. Help Staff Get to the Next Level

To continue to develop, your team members might need help assessing their strengths and weaknesses. Even if they don't aspire to higher-level roles, they still need to develop to their fullest potential. Help employees see where they struggle and put plans in place to transform those weaknesses into strengths. This might mean having some tough conversations, says Scharber, as you need to say, "Here's where you are now, here's where you want to be, and here's a plan to navigate that delta." Also, don't forget to talk about the positives by praising employees for the good work they're doing in other areas.

One final note: Scharber emphasizes that leadership development is never a completed project, from the C-suite to the frontline staff. It all starts with asking yourself, "Am I a good leader?" Regardless of your role, you can tap into plenty of leadership resources to improve. You can find mentors, hire consultants, go to training, attend seminars, take online courses, and read books. "You just need to be willing to put in the effort to become a better leader and continually challenge yourself."

"You don't build a business. You build people, and people build the business." – Zig Ziglar

What Does It Mean to Be a Good Leader?

The most important thing for good leaders in a people-driven service business, is someone who absolutely puts people first and truly cares about their staff. Since the most important asset in your organization is your people, it makes sense to take care of them. A good leader treats staff right, develops them, and builds a great culture. In doing so, your people will take care of your patients, which will yield better outcomes.

"I think the number one attribute of a really great leader is putting your staff first, doing everything you can to give them the opportunity to be successful," says Eric Scharber, Principal at Simone Healthcare Consultants. Scharber leads talent acquisition and employee retention efforts for the home care and hospice industry through Simone Healthcare Consultants and Exact Recruiting, a Simone Talent Solution.

Another key leadership trait? Honing your communication abilities and adapting to changes. This is especially important when working with the newer generation who prefer different kinds of feedback and styles of communication.

A good leader also invests in staff, spending time with them (and real money on them), while also giving them opportunities to “work above their pay grade” to make themselves a better employee than they were when they were initially hired.

Of course, good leadership requires transparency and honesty. When you let staff know what’s going on, what business decisions are being made (and why), you build trust throughout the organization.

All of these leadership traits go a long way in attracting—and keeping—top talent.

What Top Talent Looks for in an Employer

Simione Healthcare Consultants and Exact Recruiting have interviewed more than 70,000 people, which allows consideration of a database to identify trends when it comes to attracting top talent. In a nutshell, here’s what first-rate prospects look for in an employer:

1.

Is the company transparent and up-front with staff?

2.

Do opportunities exist to grow, shine, and rise through the organization?

3.

Is the company respected by and involved in the community?

4.

Does the organization have dynamic leadership?



How Talent Development Creates Value Within an Organization

Whether your organization is for-profit or non-profit, you're looking for the margins, and the value of talent development is evident here in several layers.

First, you develop people so they can then execute on your organization's mission in a very positive way. This ultimately reflects in your positive outcomes and your organization's financial success.

But there is a big push these days with industry consolidation, with a lot of mergers and acquisitions taking place. If your organization is looking to sell, then consider this. The talent within your organization drives better numbers, and that makes a difference when a potential buyer starts doing diligence for possible acquisition. The talent within your company is going to make the sheer number value of your company much greater—possibly a difference in millions.

Therefore, if you're thinking about selling down the road, focus on developing your leadership. Not only will you get the results you need now, but talent development will create more value from a numbers standpoint when you ultimately do sell.



Eric Scharber

Principal

Simione Healthcare Consultants
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talent solution



Exact Recruiting, a Simione Talent Solution, specializes in post-acute care, offering the largest network of home care and hospice professionals through recruiting, executive search, non-executive search, interim management, and advisory services for employee retention and satisfaction.

Simione Healthcare Consultants provides business solutions for home health and hospice with a diverse group of experts in clinical operations, finance, compliance, sales and marketing, cost reporting, information technology, talent management, data analytics, and mergers and acquisitions. Our team supports performance improvement across the healthcare continuum, engaging agencies, hospitals and health networks to enhance quality, reduce cost and minimize risk.

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