

Beyond Motivation

Igniting Inspired Leadership in Healthcare

“Motivation is when you get hold of an idea and carry it through to its conclusion, and inspiration is when an idea gets hold of you and carries you where you are intended to go.”

DR. WAYNE DYER

Motivate and inspire. In healthcare leadership, the two words are often used as though they're interchangeable, repeated almost reflexively by anyone trying to rally a team through another demanding shift, another short staffing stretch, another round of change. Treat the two as the same, though, and you risk missing a critical distinction in your evolution as a healthcare leader.

Motivation is of the ego. Inspiration is of the soul. Knowing how to motivate can make you an effective manager. Knowing how to inspire is what will define your legacy as a healthcare leader.

Being inspirational can feel like an intangible trait, the kind of thing you either have or you don't. History's most magnetic leaders, Winston Churchill, John F. Kennedy, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., seem to have been born with an outsized capacity for influence. So if inspiring others is something we all want, yet it seems to be something you are rather than something you do, does that mean inspiration is impossible to teach?

Not quite.

Inspirational leadership, even in the highest-pressure corners of healthcare, can be built through thoughtful and consistent practice. And there's a straightforward place to start.

PRINCIPLE ONE

Look Within First

Want to be inspirational to the nurses, physicians, and staff who depend on your leadership? You must first be inspired yourself.

Think about the people across your own career who have inspired you: a charge nurse who never let chaos rattle her calm, a mentor physician, an ASC administrator who could turn a packed surgical schedule into a calm, well-run day, a CEO who could rally an entire health system around a shared mission. You'll likely notice a common thread. You fed off their enthusiasm. If you don't have clarity on where your unit, clinic, surgery center, or organization is headed, how can you expect your team to feel inspired to join you on that journey?

Great healthcare leaders carry a crystal-clear vision for what the future of patient care, team culture, and organizational impact can look like, and they communicate that vision with precision and contagious energy. To genuinely inspire your team, start by asking yourself the questions that matter most:

QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING YOURSELF

- ◆ What problem does our organization solve, or what care do we provide, and why does that matter to me personally?
- ◆ What are we building together, for our patients, our community, and our team?
- ◆ Why is this team special? What makes us proud to be part of this particular group of clinicians and staff?
- ◆ What are my one-, three-, and five-year dreams for my team, and what will day-to-day life look like for everyone involved when we get there?
- ◆ How does that dream connect on a personal level with each member of my team, from the bedside to the boardroom?
- ◆ How does each team member want to be remembered, both for the impact they had on patients and the role they played among their peers?
- ◆ What am I giving to the people I work alongside every single day?

Highly successful healthcare leaders ask the right questions of themselves first. The answers are what move careers, and organizations, forward.

PRINCIPLE TWO

Change from the Inside Out

Leaning on motivation alone is the comfort zone for many healthcare leaders. It's wildly effective in the short term: it pushes teams to keep pace with patient volume, whether that's a hospital

floor managing census, an ASC moving through a full surgical block, or a clinic working through a packed appointment day, and it compels staff to compete against benchmarks and measure themselves against other units or sites. Motivation compels action. It pushes staff past perceived limits and gets the next shift covered, the next deadline met.

But motivation without inspiration is temporary, and in an industry already strained by burnout, temporary isn't good enough. Motivation can drive results. Inspiration drives the purpose connected to those results.

That connection to purpose is what keeps nurses, physicians, and administrative staff tethered to a mission, and to a leader, for years rather than months.

When a healthcare leader reaches the hearts and minds of their team, those individuals are changed from the inside out. When people act because of a deeply connected desire from within, rather than an external push, that action becomes sustainable, and infinitely more meaningful to the work of patient care.

PRINCIPLE THREE

Perpetual Improvement

One of the strongest value propositions any healthcare leader can offer a team member is the opportunity for that individual to grow continuously, in every dimension. The message that someone else believes in your potential, that someone else sees room for your growth, can be one of the most powerful connectors in a clinical or administrative career.

Professional and personal growth are the obvious categories, but don't overlook financial, mental, and even spiritual growth as well. In nature, living things either grow or decline; they rarely stay the same. Inside a healthcare organization, that nourishment is often labeled training, but a more accurate word is learning. What is your organization doing each week to foster learning, growth, and fresh perspective among your clinical and support staff?

Don't be afraid to give your team room to grow into their roles. Open the gates and let the human need for autonomy and purpose flourish, particularly among clinicians who entered this field specifically to make a difference. People want to do well. They want to succeed. Too often, that drive is suppressed by a leader's own need for control, or by cumbersome processes baked into the organization. Inspire your team by giving them a purpose they connect with, a timeline for results, and the authority to act on what they know.

PRINCIPLE FOUR

Be the Hardest Worker in the Room

When the team is out of gas after a brutal stretch on the floor, in the OR, or at the front desk of a busy clinic, you find a way to inject more fuel. When the team doesn't know what to do next during a crisis, you lead by example. Whether they say it out loud or not, your staff want to see a leader who is genuinely hungry for the mission to succeed, one who is willing to do whatever is needed, whenever it's needed, to get the work done: rounding with the team during a difficult shift, staying visible on the floor during a surge, helping an ASC team reset between cases on a packed block day, or jumping in at the clinic front desk when the schedule backs up.

Don't mistake this principle for martyrdom. It doesn't mean being first in and last out every single day without exception. In fact, some of the busiest-looking people in healthcare leadership are often the ones managing their time the least effectively. Unplugging and taking real time off matters, both for you and as a model for your team.

What matters most is that your team can clearly see your dedication to doing the hard work required for the mission to succeed. You'll be glad to see the byproduct of that dedication when the rest of your team follows in the same direction.

Motivate less. Inspire more.

The healthcare leaders who are remembered are rarely the ones who pushed hardest. They are the ones who helped their teams connect to something larger than the next shift, the next metric, or the next deadline. That is the leadership healthcare needs now.

The HealthCare Initiative partners with hospitals, health systems, physician groups, ambulatory surgery centers, and clinics nationwide to build leadership teams capable of inspiring, not just managing, through whatever challenges come next. To learn more about identifying and developing inspirational leadership within your organization, connect with a member of The HealthCare Initiative team today.

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