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Leading Change With Grit and Resiliency

Three best practices are experience, agility and passion.

Change can be daunting to even the most resilient of leaders; however, with the right preparation, vision and leadership, organizational transformation can be invigorating. And when everyone is invested in change—when they work toward a shared vision and benefits—it can shift from a dangerous unknown to an exciting endeavor. Above all, effective leadership through change makes the difference.

KentuckyOne Health, the largest health system in the Commonwealth of Kentucky, was created from change. In 2012, three well-known systems with distinct cultures, experiences and legacies merged to form one, innovative, patient-focused organization designed for the future of our industry. To meet the anticipated care needs in the Commonwealth, we brought change that impacted employees at every level.

I was hired as president and CEO during this period of change, and each day seemed to bring a new challenge or problem to solve that at times was formidable. During this period I fully realized just how necessary personal grit and resiliency are to leading change. As our journey continues, I have identified three best practices from my experience that are

imperative for leading change: experience, agility and passion.

It is critical to surround yourself with people who have different experience insights and competencies and who also possess grit and resiliency.

Experience

It is highly unlikely a leader of a hospital or health system will have the skill set and experience needed in every area of the organization. That is why it is critical to surround yourself with people who have different experiences, insights and competencies, and who also possess grit and resiliency. Leading change is not an individual endeavor; it is a team effort.

In our situation, we not only needed strong leadership to govern our new organization, but also to ensure these organizations were blended seamlessly and each facility had the right people in place. Our leadership team made difficult decisions about personnel and resource allocations while setting the vision for KentuckyOne Health. No one person could have navigated all of the challenges we

faced, nor could any one person have made all the necessary decisions. We needed a passionate team with strength and a range of experiences so that, together, we could lead KentuckyOne Health into becoming the organization we envisioned.

Agility

Agility, defined as being able to adapt to new circumstances, is necessary when leading change. In the healthcare industry, regulations, laws and pathways to reimbursement are in constant flux. When KentuckyOne Health was in the process of being created, the Affordable Care Act had just been signed into law, and our state's Medicaid expansion was not yet realized. Today, the ACA has changed how we do business in a number of ways and, along with Medicaid expansion, has brought many newly insured persons through our doors. Our organization quickly adapted its way of doing business and handling reimbursements, while placing sufficient emphasis on educating these new consumers to the health system.

It is important that leaders set a strategy yet remain nimble enough to adjust those strategies when necessary. Change is and always will be a part of our industry, but that does not mean change is simple to enact. As leaders, we need to accept that we won't always do things

perfectly the first time; when it is clear that course corrections are needed, the work involved in adjusting plans and communicating changes in decision making should be embraced as the organization continues to move forward.

Passion

It is critical that leaders maintain their passion when guiding change. A strong leader is someone who establishes a vision that others accept, share and accelerate. To do this, leaders must articulate and passionately communicate the rationale and importance of the change being made.

I grew up in a rural area in Georgia, where access to healthcare was

extremely limited. The passion that first drove me to enter nursing school was to bring quality healthcare to all, regardless of location, income, race or background. That passion still drives me today. While navigating the changes at KentuckyOne Health, I relied on that passion to help me set the tone for the organization. As a large, statewide health system, we are fortunate to have many rural facilities that allow us to provide the best care possible to rural communities.

When in the midst of massive change, even simple tasks can seem overwhelming. It is at this time that physicians, nurses and employees look to leaders for stability. I am thankful for the experienced leaders

I have the privilege to work alongside at KentuckyOne Health.

Change and transformation at the organization will continue. I am confident in our future because of leaders who provide us with strength to adapt to the constant flux of the industry. Above all, our collective passion for the vision and mission at KentuckyOne Health allows us to bring energy and enthusiasm to our roles each and every day, allowing us to lead change and enable the necessary transformation. ▲

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