

Leading Ways: Developing Others

By Ed O'Neil, Principal, O'Neil & Associates

One of the traits of all successful leaders is the ability to develop others around them. These efforts produce an abundant return for the leader and the organization, but I'm always surprised at how little attention it gets from many leaders. The rewards are indeed compound. First, you get colleagues that have a richer set of skills and are more confident in the use of those skills. Second, your commitment to them to be fully engaged with their development is one of the most powerful motivational tools available. Third, delegation is so much easier if it is done in the context of a strategic development plan. Fourth, your ability to influence down will be deeply enhanced if a fundamental part of the relationship is based on your commitment to their development. Finally, if you commit to developing them, then you do not have to do anything else for succession planning. It comes as a freebee in the process.

One action — a commitment to development — produces all of the above. And, if you work it for a bit and with sincerity, the person you are developing will actually start to drive this development agenda for both of you.

Most leaders want to develop their people or even feel like they are, but the reality is that they are not systematic in their efforts. This ends up wasting time and sometimes even working at cross purposes to what they want to achieve.

I think a commitment to each direct report of three hours a year, done in an informed and formal manner is all that is required of calendar time to accomplish this. But it has to be done in the right way and with the mindful engagement by the manager.

Over the years I've developed some material to support leaders in this essential task. I've recently updated and edited all of these resources. This tip sheet provides a framework for developing others as well as links to these other resources. When getting started you might want to take a look at the [Guide for Motivation, Development, Delegation and Succession Planning](#) and the [General Guide to Mentoring](#).

Here are five steps to improving your skills to develop others:

- 1. Know Yourself** – The first step is to understand what you bring to the process of developing others. What are the particular ways that you approach the world, interact with people, get inspiration and insight, do your work, and channel your drive and energy? Being a successful mentor, coach, and supervisor who can develop others is driven by how well you understand, accept, change when needed, and effectively use yourself to achieve the goals of working with others. Developing this self-knowledge is an essential step in being a good mentor. [Reflecting on How You Develop Others](#) provides a few self-assessment questions to assist you in assessing your skills at developing others.
- 2. Build the Relationship** – Good mentoring involves more than just the technical process of sharing information. It is fundamentally about developing a solid and supportive relationship in which information can be shared both ways in a trusting and supportive manner. Without this relationship dimension, the very best insights and observations about another person's development will be wasted because without trust the messages will not be heard, fully understood, or valued. It is the strength of this relationship that allows you to give constructive

Leadership Tips

Leadership Tips is an ongoing series produced by the Center for Health Care Strategies' Medicaid Leadership Institute in collaboration with O'Neil & Associates.

The series is designed to provide general guidance to help leadership of state agencies and their senior managers develop and refine the skills and expertise necessary to successfully lead their state programs. To view the full series, visit www.chcs.org/leadership-tips.



input and be heard. Without this, the negative will be heard and understood as a critique of the person you are developing, not the skills in that person that you want to call out. My secret words are, “I want you to be successful.” If you can lead with these and, more importantly, live up to them with your time and courage to speak the truth, then you will build a lasting connection. There are many ways to work on building the relationship. Putting time and energy into developing them is a solid start. [Active listening](#) will also build a stronger tie to the person you are developing.

3. **Share Something Practical** – Your staff want to be successful and you need to share with them the pathway to that success. Sadly, you know a lot and it is likely to come across like drinking from a fire hose: too much, too soon. It is not about what you know, but how they can learn. Think about the questions you had when you were new, not the rarefied ones that move you now. These are basic things like skills to develop, people to know, how to be present in every meeting. That will be enough, and it will establish a safe and comfortable foundation from which to share all of the other great insight you have to offer. I have a few suggestions for these [first meetings with a new direct report](#). It is also helpful to have them do some work before that first session. This is a [questionnaire](#) I use before coaching that can easily be adapted to different positions and your expectations.
4. **Build a Constructive and Supportive Feedback Environment** – This is essential; all of the work that you have put into this process will be wasted if you do not carefully build a safe environment in which you can give affirming and corrective feedback that can be heard, understood, and valued. This link will take you to some suggestions for building the environment and giving the [feedback](#).
5. **Develop a Plan** – Finally, it all comes down to the plan. A written agreement between you and them on what they will be working on. There are suggestions for this in the two guides mentioned above. But a specific tool I like to use combines work challenges, future directions, and external developments. You should use the [goal development plan](#) form as a guide to develop one that works for you, and more importantly them.

About Ed O’Neil

Ed O’Neil, PhD, MPA, is the owner of O’Neil & Associates, a management consulting and leadership development firm focused on change and renewal in the health care system. He was previously professor in the Departments of Family and Community Medicine, Preventive and Restorative Dental Sciences, and Social and Behavioral Sciences (School of Nursing) at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF). At UCSF, he served as the director of the Center for the Health Professions, a research, advocacy, and training institute that he created in 1992. His work over the past three decades has focused on changing the US health care system through improved policy and leadership. To learn more, visit www.oneil-and-associates.com; contact Ed O’Neil at herringoneil@gmail.com.

About the Medicaid Leadership Institute

The *Medicaid Leadership Institute*, an initiative of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation led by the Center for Health Care Strategies, helps Medicaid directors develop the skills and expertise necessary to successfully lead their state programs in an ever-changing policy environment. In addition, *CHCS Medicaid Academies* provide policy and leadership training for senior Medicaid staff as well as colleagues across partnering state and county agencies. Ed O’Neil has advised numerous MLI Fellows and Medicaid senior managers over the past decade. To learn more, visit www.chcs.org/medicaid-leaders.

Leadership Tips is reprinted with permission from O’Neil and Associates.