

Leading Ways: Quick Six

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There are many situations where a leader needs to make a quick assessment of what is happening and decide a course of action. The **Quick Six** is a handy way of running through important considerations when you are scrambling to make a decision.

1. Consider the Relationship

Before any action is taken, it is always important to consider the relationship at stake in the interaction. Relationships are an essential dynamic of leadership. They are forged, improved, and sometimes damaged or destroyed in these critical moments. Ask yourself these questions:

- *How important is my relationship with the other person or group to achieving my goals, now and in the future?*
- *Is this a short-term relationship or will we be working on projects long after this issue is over?*
- *How does the other party see and value this relationship?*
- *Is this a reciprocal relationship? Or is the unevenness so extreme as to damage the quality or our work together?*
- *Do we see this relationship in similar ways or is there an imbalance that could be detrimental?*
- *Is the status quo of this relationship good enough or could we both benefit from it getting better?*

There is never complete information in any of these Quick Six considerations, but framing the relationship situation and issues can improve your effectiveness as a leader.

2. Assess Power

Any assessment of a situation must include a cold, hard look at power, as it can have a dramatic influence immediately. It can disrupt what we want to achieve as a leader, regardless if we are leading up, out, or down. Power comes in many forms, but one useful way to think about it is whether it is formal power, often structural or political in its nature, or informal power, which covers a broad array of things, including specialty knowledge, persuasiveness, experience, relationship capital, and the ability to withdraw effort. Some questions to ask regarding power are:

- *Who has the power now? Is it formal or informal?* The formal power is easier to see, but getting a clear understanding of the informal power is often more useful in improving our understanding of a situation.
- *Is power in a state of flux?* This often means that the environment is changing in a way that will lead to a shift in power. And, *is this a time when the leader might gain more power because of this flux? Will my actions lead to a loss of power that I am unwilling to sustain at this time?*

3. Gauge Quality

The shorthand for the third consideration is the quality of what is at stake. By this we mean whether the path that has been chosen, through either a decision, negotiation, or course of action, is technically the correct path or not. Often it seems matters should be able to be resolved in a rational, data driven or scientific manner. But even with the

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most rarified scientific issues the answers are often not obvious. There are better and worse courses we might take, but the final decision is likely to lie with intuition, power, tradition, or just chance as it is with a knowable set of technically correct data. Some questions to ask in the context of quality are:

- *What data do we have and how reliable is it? The data is objective, but is the interpretation that is being presented? Has the context of what we are doing changed since the data was originally collected?*

Technical correctness of any action or decision is often in the eye of the actor or decider. Smart leaders use the Quick Six framework to check the veracity of what has been presented, even if they are doing the presenting.

4. Determine Importance

Deeply integrated with the quality of an action or decision is the importance of what is under consideration. If something is technically the correct thing to do but is of little importance, it may dramatically change the assessment of the situation. There are two important contexts in which to consider importance. The first is the importance to the team, department, agency, or organization.

- *Is this issue mission critical? Is there some threat if this is not accomplished? How do others in the organization, particularly the leadership, feel about this issue, problem, concern, or opportunity?*

The other dimension is how important is this matter to me.

- *Is your ego heavily invested in this decision or course of action? How has this ownership colored your judgement around the level of importance and even your sense of the quality of the decisions that have been reached?*

5. Weigh Time

An assessment of a situation needs to include an awareness of the time horizon against which decisions need to be made. If time allows, it will almost always improve the quality of the outcome. Some questions to explore are:

- *Who is driving the timetable for this and what are their interests?*
- *Are there legitimate and objective reasons to slow or quicken this process?*
- *What relationship gains will I possibly secure by a delay and what is the value of this added level of engagement with others?*
- *Are there other values that can be enhanced by a delay, such as better data, better understanding of consequences, or exploration of other options?*

Any delay is likely to produce better data, more buy-in, and a richer set of options. The critical question is what the real value of these is and if they make an impact in any significant way in the outcome.

6. Consider Necessary Buy-In

Finally, the Quick Six asks that you take a few minutes to consider the amount of buy-in that will be needed in the undertaking by all relevant stakeholders. The first step here is being aware of who these individuals or groups are and relatively how essential they are to the process and ultimate success. Involvement and collaboration are important, but they are also costly. Active consideration of the buy-in dimension can let the leader provide the proper amount of time and effort to invest in a decision or implementation process. More engagement can dramatically improve the quality of what is being considered, but it can also splinter the options into a miasma of choices and actually reduce the value and slow the process.

The Quick Six can be used in anticipation of a meeting, conflict, negotiation, or decision. The analysis provides a good foundation upon which to build other considerations. It is also focused enough to be useful in real-time interactions, not only providing a valuable frame for analysis and action, but also as a way to relieve some stress of the moment.

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

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