

# The Governance Institute

## Identifying New Physician Leaders

In the current healthcare world, hospitals and health systems should spend time identifying physician leaders and preparing the most engaged, knowledgeable physicians for a role in governance. Those physicians who aspire to be in governance can begin to learn leadership skills that enhance both management and the ability to guide other physicians, clinicians, and medical staff toward clinical and financial benchmarks and drive them toward future success. Physician leadership development is much more accessible now through education and training, and physicians can take advantage of these programs in order to prepare for participation in leadership and governance roles.

As the board considers the idea of having physicians on the board or expanding their physician board membership, it should reflect on what characteristics make an effective physician leader and whether those skills translate to the world of governance. Some skills and qualities that the board can look for in future physician leaders include:<sup>1</sup>

1. **Collaboration and cooperation.** These are both mandatory traits. Finding compromises, welcoming new ideas, and often meeting in the middle are necessary attributes in leadership roles. Building new teams across the care continuum requires an open mind and a willingness to accept different ideas and change.
2. **Strong listening skills.** The collaboration and teamwork requires good listening skills. Good listeners hear the true message conveyed—not just the words. The ability to listen to conflict and disagreement while working towards cooperation must be developed.
3. **Communication skills.** Both verbal and written communication skills are critical. Clarity, precision of message, and the ability to be consistent and be heard are necessary to deliver a message of change. The ability to present and tell a story with listeners engaged and understanding the message is critical.
4. **Self-confidence and mental resilience.** Both are necessary for a change agent. Not all may welcome the changes in healthcare, and the agent of change at times needs to have tough skin.
5. **Humility.** Humility and the ability to accept the missteps and mistakes that will occur at times are essential. While this seems in conflict with the characteristic of self-confidence above, it is the balance of self-confidence and humbleness that will serve physician leaders very well in being effective at every level of governance and leadership.
6. **Lack of arrogance.** A lack of arrogance in giving direction and guidance is necessary. Transforming healthcare requires teambuilding as well as giving direction. However, the direction needs to invoke a collaborative and participatory environment—not one of “I say; you do.”
7. **Appreciation for others.** An appreciation for others’ thoughts, ideas, and input is vital. A team culture will only materialize when its members believe their voices are heard, their contributions matter, and their ideas are considered. People will defend and take ownership of decisions they have helped to make.
8. **Mentoring.** Mentoring team members must be in the skill set, and if it is not, then it must be developed. The skills to allow professional development of other physicians,

---

<sup>1</sup> Graham A. Brown, et al., *Payment Reform, Care Redesign, and the “New” Healthcare Delivery Organization*, The Governance Institute, 2012 Signature Publication.

clinical staff, and administrators may take time and effort but promotes successful, self-sustaining teams.

9. **Vision.** The vision to see beyond the short-term and stay the course toward the future is needed. True physician leaders have the vision to look to the future and navigate the system, physicians, and teams through the challenges of healthcare transformation to the next level and beyond.

The physician perspective is valuable in the boardroom and in senior leadership positions. Begin now to identify physicians with leadership potential and support their education, training, and coaching efforts consistently.