

Reality Check: Is Your Behavior Aligned With Organizational Goals?

By Arthur Lazarus, MD, MBA, CPE, FACPE

Organizational behavior is the study of human behavior in the workplace, specifically the interaction between employees and the organization.

Although organizational behavior has been studied for over a half-century, health care leaders only recently began to understand the steps physicians can take to improve organizational effectiveness and how to engage physicians in support of organizational goals.

Some physicians fail to appreciate the importance of aligning their behavior with the goals of organizations they work in or come in frequent contact with. Medical training fosters autonomy and physicians often work independently. Indeed, major reasons for failure among physician executives include inadequate interpersonal skills, lack of concern for others as individuals and poor role models for subordinates.¹

Even physicians in solo practice have been forced to recognize the significance of organizational behavior, at least the importance of connecting with people.

According to Ronald N. Yeaple, author of *The Success Principle*, solo practitioners should think of themselves as CEOs of a "company of one." Yeaple writes: "As CEO of your company of one, you recognize that your effectiveness is determined in large part by your ability to get things done with and through other people. The old command-and-control model of management—'do it because I'm the boss' is becoming less prevalent, and managers are increasingly dependent on their own personal leadership skills to get things done."²

Richard L. Reese examined the effect of managed care on physician organizational behavior and concluded that "physicians don't necessarily have to become an 'employee' of an outside entity, or be herded into an organization to which they don't want to belong. But they do have to become stronger financially, more collaborative, better organized, and more business-like."³

IN THIS ARTICLE...

Strong, well-thought-out organizational behaviors help instill confidence in patients and allow physicians to take a leadership role in health care.

Disillusionment sets in

Results of a study conducted by David A. Kindig and colleagues over a decade ago revealed that non-physician executives often valued the contribution of physician executives to organizational performance more than the physicians did themselves.⁴

Some of the most highly ranked objectives included:

- Improving quality assurance activities
- Establishing effective relationships with medical staff
- Evaluating practice patterns for efficiency
- Defining goals, priorities and directions for the organization

The investigators believed that physician executives would be reassured to know that lay managers in their organizations value their role.

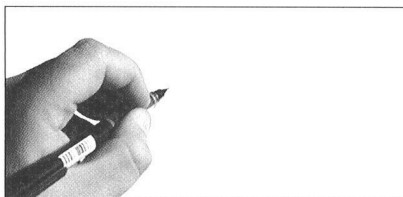
However, changes in the health care field since the time of Kindig's research further eroded relationships between physicians and organizations. Physicians are increasingly disillusioned by the practice of medicine and organizations are constantly changing as societal values and the composition of the workforce change.

Organizations are more diverse and competitive, and they are affected by technology's influence on behavior. Attempts to engage physicians in mutually beneficial partnerships frequently result in frustration and disappointment.

Organizational behaviors are a key part of a company's people strategy. These behaviors are essential to the success of the organization and help form the basis of its long-term growth. Organizational behaviors speak to how

the company intends to succeed; they need to be brought to life by each employee incorporating them into his or her daily work and interactions with customers and colleagues. All parties need to be in alignment to achieve maximum business impact.

Here are seven critical organizational behaviors that should be a high priority for you and your organization, even if your organization is a company of one. Each behavior includes descriptive statements to benchmark your performance:



1. Demonstrate Technical and Professional Proficiency

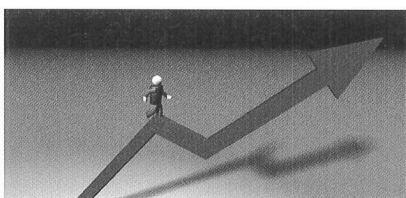
Organizations cannot succeed with mediocre employees. When Jack Welch ran GE, under-performing employees who did not improve despite coaching and development opportunities were asked to leave the company.⁵ You must possess the medical and technical knowledge required of your position, enhance your role through presentations, publications or innovation, and facilitate knowledge transfer when interacting with key stakeholders. Communication skills are essential and you must gain insight from listening to others.



2. Focus on Customers

Ask whether you are focused on internal and external customers. Think of a "customer" in the broad-

est sense—a patient, colleague, administrator, vendor, etc. Do you build and maintain relationships with key customers, understand their needs and deliver concrete solutions that meet the needs of both the customer and the business? Recognize the diversity of your customers and consider them in virtually all decisions you make.



3. Drive Business Performance

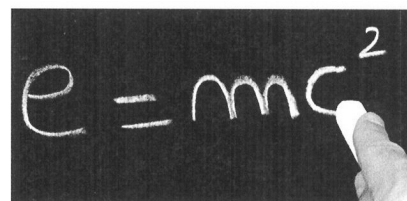
Performance and development of people are high on the agenda for just about any company. Successful companies learn how to develop high-performing employees and align them with their business strategy. Your personal goals and objectives should closely match those of your organization and contribute to its success. Work with a sense of urgency to deliver quality results faster, effectively and efficiently. Learn from your experience and share best practices with colleagues to improve output and business results. Take informed risks and set examples for others; if you make mistakes, make sure someone else can learn from them.



4. Show Passion in Teams

Do you work with colleagues on shared goals and celebrate your wins? Do you support and encourage each other, consider diverse perspectives, and present a united

front when there are differences of opinion? Are you able to lead multidisciplinary work groups to develop medical strategies and action plans? Only by leveraging the talents of teams can organizations continue to be innovative and thrive in a competitive environment.



5. Solve Problems Effectively

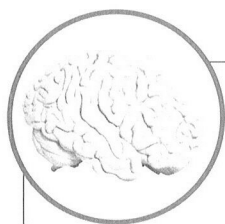
Problem solving requires a combination of analytical thinking and strategic thinking. The former involves gathering and evaluating information as a framework for examining an issue, whereas the latter considers the organizations' competitive positioning when making strategic decisions. Ask whether you can respond to medical crises based on a deep understanding of the issues and medical facts. Can you create meaningful analyses of medical and market data that drive the organization in a new, more productive, direction? Can you help your company pursue and maximize cutting-edge opportunities that may have broad, long-term business implications, e.g., a merger, product extension, or expansion of services?



6. Plan and Organize Activities Around SMART Goals

In a truly unified company, people will have a line of sight to the business strategy as they work towards common goals. Understanding how to align personal and organizational

goals requires planning along a time horizon. But much of what physicians have been trained to do is reactive rather than proactive. Developing personal goals and business plans requires appropriate resource allocation, anticipation and adaptation to change, and timely and successful execution of objectives. Objectives must be prioritized to reflect current resources and forecasted demands. Your goals must be SMART—specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound. People tend to procrastinate setting goals, but goal setting is the foundation for personal and business success. In fact, you should consider additional goals beyond SMART goals.



Beyond SMART Goals

- **S** means specific, but stretching, systematic, synergistic, significant and shifting are appropriate.
- **M** stands for measurable, but meaningful, memorable, motivating and even magical round out the picture.
- **A** is an attainable goal, but A also needs to stand for achievable, action plans, accountability, acumen and agreed-upon.
- **R** means realistic, but it also stands for relevant, reasonable, resonating, results-oriented, rewarding, responsible, reliable, rooted in facts and remarkable.
- **T** means time-bound and it also represents timely, tangible, trackable and thoughtful.



7. Exhibit Leadership and Influence Others

Both you and your organization want to be viewed as leaders in the field. Ask yourself whether you exemplify the core values of your company. Do you build awareness of issues and gain support for your ideas? Are you a mentor to junior colleagues and a source of advice to others? Are you recognized as a thought leader in the community and within your organization? If not, what steps do you need to take to achieve distinction? Your goal is to exert strong influence on behalf of your company using facts, logic, and credible personal presence in the service of leadership, inspiring others to embrace your vision and develop a plan to get there.

Health care organizations have begun to sharpen their focus on the critical behaviors necessary for success. In order to succeed in a changing and challenging environment, an organization must have an aligned workforce and be able to regenerate itself through its people.

The way we behave and handle our responsibilities really does have a dramatic impact on the company and the patients we serve. Knowing the elements that have the greatest impact on physician behavior is essential to understanding and improving both patient and business outcomes. This information can be used to achieve optimum alignment between physicians and health care organizations.

References

1. Peters RM. *When Physicians Fail as Managers*. Tampa, Fla., American College of Physician Executives, 1994.
2. Yeaple RN. *The Success Principle*. New York, Macmillan/Spectrum, 1997.
3. Reese RL. "Impact of managed care on physician organizational behavior." *The Physician Executive*. Jan-Feb 1999, 25(1):14-20.
4. Dunham NC, Kindig DA and Schulz R. "The value of the physician executive role to organizational effectiveness and performance." *Health Care Manage Rev* 1994, 19(4):56-63.
5. Welch JJ. *Straight From the Gut*. New York, Warner, 2001.



Arthur Lazarus, MD, MBA, CPE, FACPE, is

senior director of clinical research for AstraZeneca Pharmaceuticals based in Wilmington, Delaware. He is a frequent contributor to *The Physician Executive* and editor of *MD/MBA: Physicians on the New Frontier of Medical Management* (American College of Physician Executives, 1998). He can be reached by phone at 302-885-4542 or by e-mail at arthur.lazarus@astrazeneca.com.

Thanks to Glenn Gormley, MD, PhD, for elucidating several of the organizational behaviors discussed in this article.