



UNLOCK YOUR LEADERSHIP POTENTIAL: SEE AND INSPIRE BEYOND THE LENS



Highlights from a recent YoungOD Connect mentoring session.

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All doctors are leaders in some form or fashion. We are charged with inspiring our patients, and we have technicians and ancillary staff who work with us to provide quality patient care. Whether we're employed or have a practice of our own, we as doctors of optometry have the ability to influence the people with whom we come into contact. If we understand how to harness the power we have, we can create big changes

whether as a practice owner or an associate optometrist.

MY PATH TO OPTOMETRY

I grew up in Canada, and when I was 16, I went to the DMV to get my license. I took the vision screening test, and they told me I wasn't getting my license that day because I couldn't see some of the letters, which was a shock to me. I was a very low myope and didn't realize it. I had to schedule an appointment with an optometrist, and

when I tried on my first pair of glasses, I realized I had not been seeing well before then. Going through that whole experience with my optometrist—I knew at that point that's what I wanted to do. So, I completed my undergraduate studies at the University of Waterloo and then attended the Southern College of Optometry in Memphis, where I graduated in 2010.

Growing up shy and introverted, I never envisioned becoming a leader, let alone training others to improve



"Health care workers who work in an environment that promotes great leadership and work culture tend to go above and beyond to provide better patient care," Dr. Chwe told attendees of his YoungOD Connect mentoring session.

as leaders. However, my desire to help naturally grew from recognizing others had a need for it. As an example, when I recognized my fellow classmates were stressed out and seeking direction and guidance, I became class president to ensure they had a smoother, less stressful experience.

Early in my career, I took charge when I noticed disengaged employees and widespread burnout. I aimed to create an environment where employees felt happy to be at work and produced great results. While nurturing my team, I also supported others grappling with leadership challenges, and I realized my ability to connect was a gift. I enjoyed witnessing the overall mood and work ethic improve among employees and desired for others to feel that same joy. This naturally evolved into coaching and speaking about leadership.

CAN ANYONE BE A GOOD LEADER?

The short answer is yes, if you allow yourself. Just like any other skill, it takes practice. But you have to be in the right state of mind. It won't work if you think, "I am the way I am. I was born this way. I'm too old to learn new things." That's a fixed mindset, and someone with this mindset is not likely to improve. Ask yourself if the investment required to improve is worth the happiness that comes from having a thriving workplace culture. Would you prefer to spend time in a positive work environment, or

would you rather dread going to work because of the overall mood there?

WHY DOES LEADERSHIP MATTER?

Leaders inspire action. We have to learn to view ourselves as a person of influence if we hope to inspire our patients to adhere to the treatments we recommend.

If we are clouded by distracting thoughts, we tend to make more mistakes when it comes to patient care, which, as we all know, can lead to very serious consequences. So, we want to make sure we're on our A game.

When health care professionals were exposed to great leadership and a positive work culture, studies have shown it not only led to better patient satisfaction and care, but the clinicians also did more than simply provide a treatment to their diagnosis—they went above and beyond by seeking the cause of the problem.¹ As professionals, we are more likely to be in this high-performing state of mind when we are less anxious, feel valued, and have excellent job satisfaction.

In addition, staff turnover, whether someone willingly quits or is let go, costs the practice a lot of money in the form of recruiting, training and onboarding new staff, and loss of productivity in the process. There are also costs involved in paying the existing staff members overtime to work in place of the lost staff member(s). So, it can be a big deal to lose staff to low job satisfaction, which can occur in situations where leadership is lacking.

WHAT DOES SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP LOOK LIKE?

Several attributes can contribute to your success as a leader. Some that come to mind may include charisma, kindness, compassion, empathy, good listening and communication skills, determination, and confidence. However, the number one quality that determines your success as a leader is the ability to positively energize those around you. What does this

mean? Let me first explain what being a positive energizer is *not*.

A positive energizer does not allow their staff to get away with anything and do whatever they want. This creates a toxic environment without healthy rules and boundaries. A positive energizer is also not someone who is constantly happy and cheerful. We're all human, and you can inspire great action through moments of vulnerability. In addition, being positive all the time can lead to what's called *toxic positivity*, or shaming people for not thinking optimistically, and can start to set unrealistic expectations and lead you to ignore problems that require solutions.

Rather than being positive all the time, picture yourself as a battery pack. What you are doing, ideally, is positively charging and bringing life to those around you. If you bring this presence to your community and organization, you can have a powerful effect on the way others respond to you and behave and even inspire them to do great things. What steps can we take to produce this kind of environment? I came up with the acronym PERC:

- **Purpose** (Help our staff see how their work contributes to the overall mission and the greater good. Recognize the milestones, reinforce the meaning of the work they do, celebrate their unique strengths, and, in turn, create a sense of belonging).
- **Environment** (Create an environment of gratitude and recognition, encourage optimism, and promote compassion).
- **Relationships** (Work toward building high-quality connections between not just you and the team, but also among team members. Encourage mutual respect, trust, and collaboration).
- **Communication** (It's important that you focus on what's possible, give constructive feedback, use uplifting dialogue, show genuine interest, and practice active listening while communicating with your staff).

DELIVER NEGATIVE INFORMATION IN A POSITIVE MANNER

When there's bad news to deliver to staff, a criticism to be made, or a mistake to be discussed, is there a way to deliver that message that makes them feel empowered to do better next time? I follow the three steps below when faced with such a situation.

Step No. 1

To quote Stephen Covey, "Begin with the end in mind." Before you initiate a difficult conversation, ask yourself what you are trying to achieve or what you want this person to understand, and keep that goal of what you want the outcome to be in mind.

Step No. 2

Remember your role as a positive energizer. You want to deliver your message to your staff member clearly about what they did, but at the end of the conversation you want them to feel as though you truly care and see potential in them. You want them to feel more confident that they can do better because you believe they can improve. You want to positively energize them at the end of the conversation so they feel empowered, rather than bad or negative.

Step No. 3

Now that you have goals and know how you want your staff member to feel, how would you modify your language, tone, and the vibe of your conversation to achieve that goal? Will you show gratitude during your conversation to achieve this successfully? Are you displaying compassion? Are you being kind in your approach? These are the things to keep in mind when having these conversations. It takes some work initially, but just like any other skill, it can be developed and will eventually happen subconsciously.

HUMOR: AN INSTANT MOOD BOOSTER

Humor is a quick way to turn a toxic culture upside down. But remember, culture starts with you, and there's a trickle-down effect. Attitude is highly contagious. Humor, or laughter, serves two purposes: 1) It instantly improves your mood and well-being—when we laugh we feel good, and it produces all four of the feel-good hormones: dopamine, serotonin, oxytocin, and endorphins; and 2) It makes you more relatable, and employees tend to be more receptive to you,

especially if you use self-deprecating humor. There's something powerful in conveying that you're human, just like them. For example, you could find humor in a mistake that you made or something you forgot or totally misunderstood.

There are caveats to the use of humor. Make sure you are not offensive and avoid political jokes, for example. Obviously, anything with racial or sexist undertones is never acceptable. Always be inclusive and respectful. The best way to be funny without offending others is to make fun of yourself. Saying something simple and self-deprecating like, "I'm having a bad hair day. It's like I just woke up and rolled out of bed," can instantly establish rapport.

PRACTICE THE 1% RULE

Aim to improve 1% every day, and your progress will compound over time. Before you know it, you'll wonder where all these leadership skills came from. At that point, you will also be more likely to get noticed as an associate optometrist.

Revisiting the battery pack concept, does a battery pack last forever? No, it needs to be recharged before it can bring life to others. If you are stressed out or exhausted or your anxiety is through the roof, how do you think you'll behave around others? When recharging your power bank, it helps to focus on nutrition, sleep, exercise, stress management, meditation, reading, socializing, and writing a gratitude journal—these things go a long way to improve our wellbeing and help us be the best battery packs (and leaders) we can be. ■

1. Isen AM, Rosenzweig AS, Young MJ. The influence of positive affect on clinical problem solving. *Med Decis Making*. 1991;11(3):221-227.

TOM'S TOP 10 BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

1. *Start With Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* by Simon Sinek
2. *Leaders Eat Last* by Simon Sinek
3. *The New Gold Standard* by Joseph Michelli
4. *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* by John Maxwell
5. *Be Our Guest* by Theodore Kinni
6. *Connect* by Simon Lancaster
7. *Extreme Ownership* by Jocko Willink and Leif Babin
8. *The Happiness Advantage* by Shawn Achor
9. *Drive* by Daniel Pink
10. *Radical Candor* by Kim Scott

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