Leadership skills are particularly important in a changing NHS. This article describes some current opinion about leadership qualities and suggests ways in which they might be developed in pharmacy staff.

An old adage says, “managers do things right, leaders do the right things.” Hence, having good leaders is particularly important for organisations that are experiencing uncertainty or change, so that departments and services move with the times and in the right direction.

The NHS is an organisation facing challenging times, including the meeting of targets and dealing with cost restraints and reformation, all of which require visionary leadership. A recent letter from the new Chief Executive of the NHS urged trust managers to identify and develop leadership capabilities within their own organisations.

This article describes some current opinion about the qualities good leaders should possess and gives an overview of ways to develop them.

--- Leadership qualities

“Why makes a good leader?” is a common question. Opinion has identified a good leader as a person who is able to take opportunities to change things, confidently exercise initiative and have the ability to experiment and make mistakes. Further qualities identified include having self-belief, a broad perspective and a capacity to tolerate loneliness.

Panel 1 (p194) summarises some of the qualities of a good pharmacy leader identified by the authors at a workshop about leadership skills in practice. The workshop took place at last year’s joint Guild of Healthcare Pharmacists and United Kingdom Clinical Pharmacy Association conference.

--- Developing leadership

There are various ways to develop leadership qualities, including:

- **Learning from challenges**
- **Attending training programmes**
- **Performing job assignments**
- **Learning through relationships with others**

--- Learning from challenges

The positive effects of failure can be learned through experiencing problems. In order to make the most of this approach, an individual must be put in a position of risk, where work is not easy and the outcomes are unknown. Potential benefits of this approach include that it can be particularly effective at stiffening an individual’s resolve and releasing otherwise untapped sources of energy in challenging situations, such as job loss or restructuring. However, it must be remembered that experience of failure can leave people scarred and that they may then retreat into denial and cynicism, which is damaging to all involved, particularly the individual.

--- Attending training programmes

Valuable learning opportunities can be provided from attending both informal and formal training programmes. These enable people to share valuable experiences and develop new networks. However, it must be remembered that experience of failure can leave people scarred and that they may then retreat into denial and cynicism, which is damaging to all involved, particularly the individual.

--- Careers

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Becoming a good leader — developing the skills required

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Performing job assignments Key elements of any leadership development programme are job assignments that allow individuals to learn skills as they work. They are generally regarded as the most important single factor in leadership development, but this is dependent on exposure to the right kinds of experiences. It is worth noting that people learn most by doing things they have not done before.

Learning through relationships with others Relationships with other people are of key importance in developing leadership skills. Wide networks allow for information sharing, learning about career options and pathways, and help in gaining insight into personal strengths and weaknesses. Mentoring others is a particularly useful method of developing leadership qualities and also provides opportunities for identifying potential leadership qualities in others (i.e., mentees). Knowing how to identify the qualities and skills of a “good” leader can help to identify strengths and weaknesses in ourselves and in others as well as in identifying training and development needs.

— Pharmacy approach —

During the GHP/UKCPA leadership workshop mentioned earlier, one of the key tasks for participants was to identify various assignments that they could use within their organisation to start to develop leadership skills in members of their team. Published research suggests that such assignments should include and provide:

- Small projects and start-ups
- Small “jumps” in responsibility
- Small strategic assignments
- Course work or coaching assignments
- Activities away from work and with new people

Panel 2 lists some examples of the job assignments suggested. It should be noted that not all of these examples will be suitable for all departments or trusts, because the ideas came from individual participants and therefore reflected the needs of their trusts and the skill mix available to them at the time. However, the examples provide a useful overview of the types of job assignments that could be used in a pharmacy setting to develop leadership potential in others.

It should be noted that time was taken to ensure that each assignment should provide staff with experiences and jobs that fit into the five criteria listed earlier. In practice, the next step is to try to map the outcomes of each assignment with the required qualities to ensure that the appropriate learning experience was gained.

— Conclusion —

Good leadership is particularly important in times of change, such as those currently being experienced by many NHS organisations.

Among the approaches to developing leadership qualities is mentoring, which is set to be covered in more detail in the July/August issue of Hospital Pharmacist.

— References —