

Taking the Lead

A Guide for Emerging Leaders
in Academic Medical Centers

Kyle P. Meyer
Rob Kramer



Springer

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Foreword

You have strong leadership ambitions with a desire to be an extraordinary leader who can influence others to make needed transformational change in health care. Throughout the disruption resulting from the recent pandemic and social unrest, your organization has largely been successful in fulfilling their strategic vision. However, you recognize the imminent transition of your predecessor and other staff changes due to the “great resignations” will leave a knowledge gap that will be an added challenge as you prepare to take on your new leadership role. These concerns, expressed by many related to leadership “knowhow” and courage, generate deep conversations when I wear my executive coaching hat as Division Chair of HR Leadership and Talent Development at Mayo Clinic.

Throughout my experience in human resources development at academic medical centers, I have observed emerging physician (and other health care) leaders, some eager and others reluctant, with some not well equipped for leadership responsibility as an early careerist. The lack of readiness is usually related to limited leadership experience, exposure, or education. Until recently, as would be expected, health professionals’ education has been focused primarily on medical and health-related curricula versus leadership development. Without requisite leadership knowledge, skills and ability, health professionals moving into leadership roles may not know what to do as a new leader and, as a result, may struggle in developing strategies and building teams while executing plans and maintaining relationships.

In discussions with coaches and talent development practitioners supporting leaders across various industries in private and public sectors, as well as not-for-profit and for-profit organizations, a commonly shared human resource strategic focus area is developing leaders for the future. There is hyper focus on accelerating the development process. For emerging physicians and other health profession leaders, this acceleration involves unique challenges as they balance patient and leadership needs. Patient needs are aligned with the emerging leader’s passion and purpose, and the leadership needs are aligned with the leader’s aspiration to have a meaningful impact on the system that supports the patient. The new leader’s inherent value of altruism lessens the tension between these two critical needs and motivates the emerging leader to learn the art of leadership.

Even with this altruistic objective, leadership is not easy—it is hard. There will be moments of doubts and times of crisis. For these reasons, leadership requires a strong commitment and purposeful development. Leadership development includes

clarity of the leadership role and responsibility, awareness of personal strengths and opportunities related to competencies associated with the role, and measurable goals. The process of becoming an extraordinary leader takes time and intentionality. To move to the next level, dedicated time will be required to attend learning programs, invest in coaching, network internally and externally, assess environments, and read articles and books.

Taking the Lead: A Guide for Emerging Leaders in Academic Medical Centers is “just what the doctor ordered” for both emerging and existing leaders—physicians, health professionals, scientists, administrative leaders—who want to increase their effectiveness. This incredible book addresses the core capabilities that will help ensure a successful leadership journey in academic medical centers. It is a practical and actionable guide to gain leadership insight and perspectives in the context of your organization, your team, and yourself as a leader. Meyer and Kramer understand “leadership can be all time consuming” and, as trusted guides, they share invaluable wisdom in a conversational tone that is easily digestible, with an excellent list of do’s and don’t’s, coaching questions, and resources within each chapter. Keep this book as a ready reference to maximize your potential and add ongoing value to your organization, the patients you serve, and the people you lead.

Turn the page and take the lead.

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Preface

We, the authors of this book, propose that “leadership” has been with us literally from the dawn of time. In fact, we believe leadership is an inherent characteristic of the human experience. The initial conversation between the first two speaking human beings, we imagine, went something like this...

Human #1: “*OK, so now whatta’ we do?*”

Human #2: “*Follow me.*”

And thus, leadership was born!

All kidding aside, the purpose of this book is to provide skill development guidance for anyone interested in or recently appointed to a leadership role in an academic medical center (more on this in Chap. 1). We say “skill development” as we believe leadership can be learned. That is, knowledge and insights can be gained, competencies practiced, and abilities refined, based on learning, experience, and reflection.

However, we also believe that leadership is as much art as science. Which is why it is equally magnificent and vexing. Every leader may acquire the knowledge and competencies to lead, but *how* they apply and refine these tools is the art which often determines the leader’s success.

Collectively, we have been involved in a variety of leadership roles for more than 60 years, and have coached, mentored, and developed future leaders for nearly as long. In these roles we have learned, experimented, reflected, failed often, and come back for more. Co-author Kyle P. Meyer traces the beginning of his formal leadership journey to 1977 when he was elected as the president of his physical therapy class. He went on to serve in formal roles as Chief Pediatric Physical Therapist, Director of Clinical Education, President of the Faculty Senate, chair of a national professional committee, president of a regional professional committee, Associate Dean, Senior Associate Dean, and Founding Dean. Along the way, he also served in volunteer leadership positions as President of the PTA, chair of a not-for-profit board, and president of an alumni association.

Co-author Rob Kramer has served in leadership roles in higher education as Senior Leadership Advisor, Founding Center Director, and Department Director; in non-profits as Executive Director; and as a professional Executive Coach, working with clients including hospital CEOs and C-suite executives, academic medical center deans, chairs, and administrative leaders, university presidents, provosts, deans, and other senior academic leaders. He is also the founder and CEO of a successful

coaching and consulting firm, leading a team of more than 30 coaches who provide executive coaching and leadership development for senior leaders in higher education, academic medicine, non-profits, and the public sector.

This brief overview of our leadership journeys is not intended for self-aggrandizement, rather, simply to establish some credibility. We want you to know that with each of our respective roles we've acquired invaluable lessons in leadership. These came from knowledge gained through formal instruction, informal mentoring, considerable reading, from coaching and being coached, and by applying knowledge from other fields to the art of leadership.

And we have benefited from wonderful colleagues and mentors who often saw more in us than we saw in ourselves. The list of people we could acknowledge for their contributions to our personal, professional, and leadership development is astonishingly long. These individuals taught, challenged, and more than once, bailed us out!

Our primary goal with this book is to serve you in a similar role. To share our lived experiences as mentors, formal and informal coaches and leaders, teachers, supporters, and guides. It is our sincere hope that our reflections, insights, tools, and ideas will serve as both conceptual and practical guidance for you along your leadership journey.

This book is *not* intended to be a "how to" nor a comprehensive "tour de force" on leadership (although it certainly contains plenty of useful and applicable information). In perusing the table of contents, you likely note that there are no chapters on preparing a budget, strategic planning, or managing personnel issues. Rather, this book represents our collective insights—a book of leadership wisdom if you will. The chapters present a series of leadership themes, derived from our own unique observations and perspectives, our own personal mistakes and growing pains, and our observations of other leaders (both successful and unsuccessful). We have selected themes we find important, both about leadership in general and leading in an academic medical center.

We use the word "theme" deliberately because the content of any given chapter is not wholly about a specific topic, but rather an assembling together of observations, reflections, insights, and tools related to that topic. Our purpose is to provide you with ideas, concepts, and insights that have helped us, and in so doing, our hope is that our experience can inform yours, assisting you in acquiring new skills and different perspectives, avoiding some of the mistakes we made, and becoming the best leader you can be.

A note about our writing style. You'll quickly learn that we're very serious about developing new leaders in academic medical centers, but we're also pretty informal. We believe we can better convey our thoughts in a more conversational style. And we think humor is an important aspect of leadership, and life, so you'll note some subtle (or not so subtle) reflections that are on the "lighter side" throughout the book.

We want to draw your attention to a unique feature of the book. We've ended each chapter with a section entitled, "How do I get started?" It includes a "virtual" executive coaching session consisting of relevant questions, not unlike the guidance you might receive from an executive coach. The questions are designed and arranged

to facilitate your continual reflection on, and application of, the key concepts within the chapter. We encourage you to return to them often, as you will generate different answers and new insights as you continue to gain leadership experience. We also conclude each chapter with additional resources, entitled “Curious to learn more?” to assist you in building your leadership understanding and knowledge.

Thank you for your passion to lead and for letting us be a part of your journey!

Omaha, NE, USA
Chapel Hill, NC, USA

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Kyle P. Meyer, PhD, MS, PT, FASAHP Upon earning his Bachelor of Science degree in Physical Therapy from the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC), Dr. Meyer began his career—that now spans over four decades—as a physical therapist. He practiced pediatric physical therapy for over 20 years and was instrumental in developing the first pediatric physical therapy department at Children’s Hospital and Medical Center in Omaha, NE. He returned to his alma mater in 1991 as a faculty member and Director of Clinical Education in the physical therapy program. He has gone on to hold several leadership positions throughout his over 30-year career at UNMC, including Associate Dean and Senior Associate Dean for Allied Health in the College of Medicine prior to being named the Founding Dean of the UNMC College of Allied Health Professions in 2015. Dr. Meyer also holds a Master of Science degree (anatomy) from UNMC, and both a Master of Public Administration and a PhD in Public Administration from the University of Nebraska Omaha. Dr. Meyer was a Credentialed Clinical Trainer for the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) Clinical Instructor Education and Credentialing Program (CIECP) and the Advanced Credentialed Clinical Instructor Program for 12 years. He served as a member and chair of the national APTA Clinical Instructor Education Board and co-authored the Advanced Credential Clinical Instructor Program. In 2016, Dr. Meyer was elected as a Fellow in the Association of Schools Advancing Health Professions (ASAHP) for his record of demonstrated leadership and significant contributions in allied health. He currently presides as President of the Midwest Deans Association of the ASAHP. College of Allied Health Professions, University of Nebraska Medical Center, Omaha, NE, USA



Rob Kramer, MFA, PCC Since 1998, Rob Kramer has provided executive coaching, consulting, and training, specializing in higher education and healthcare leadership and team development. He has served in leadership roles for more than 20 years in academia, including as the founding director of the Center for Leadership and Organizational Excellence at NC A&T State University and as the director of Training and Organizational Development at the University of North Carolina. Rob continues working in faculty leadership development at UNC-Chapel Hill's Institute for the Arts and Humanities. As CEO of Kramer Leadership, he oversees a team of 35 professional coaches across the country, providing executive coaching and leadership development for academic medical centers and higher education institutions. Rob is the author of *Stealth Coaching*, and *Management and Leadership Skills for Medical Faculty and Healthcare Executives* (Springer, 2nd edition, 2020); the latter has been recognized by the United Nations for helping achieve their Sustainable Development Goals for Health and Well-being. He has provided a leadership column for *Advance* healthcare magazine and is a regular contributor of leadership articles for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Additionally, Rob has guest lectured at Yale University, the University of Virginia, Duke University, and the University of Colorado, among other academic institutions. Rob did undergraduate studies at the University of Delaware and his graduate studies at the University of North Carolina and UNC-Charlotte. Rob is a Fellow at the Institute of Coaching—McLean Hospital, Harvard Medical School affiliate. He is a Professional Certified Coach (PCC) from the International Coach Federation (ICF), a Center for Creative Leadership coach, and an active member of ICF, the Association of Leadership Educators, and the Organizational Development Network. Kramer Leadership, LLC, Chapel Hill, NC, USA

Part I

Leadership in the Academic Medical Center: Insights and Perspectives



Introduction: Why You Should Read this Book

1

The title of this book is both purposeful and honest. We have worked for most of our professional lives in and with academic medical centers. It is the “site” of much of our collective leadership experience and development. As large, often bureaucratic, multi-mission organizations with competing priorities, academic medical centers represent not only an important form of organization, but a unique form as well (more on this in Chap. 2).

The Need to Develop Leaders

According to the American Association of Medical Schools (AAMC), there are approximately 154 accredited medical schools and more than 400 major teaching hospitals and health systems in the US [1]. These institutions deliver high quality, complex clinical care, serve as the foundation for continuous discovery pertaining to biomedical and clinical research, and educate the next generation of health care providers, not just in medicine, but allied health, dentistry, nursing, pharmacy, and public health.

For their survival and success, academic medical centers need to educate not only the next generation of health care providers, but the next generation of leaders to guide these unique, complex, and in many ways “peculiar” organizations. For academic medical centers to fulfill their highest value to society, they will need outstanding leadership.

The “Emerging” Leader

Our commitment to develop the next generation of academic medical center leaders led us to write this book, specifically for “emerging leaders.” There are several general characteristics that define an emerging leader. Such an individual has expressed

interest in learning about or developing the knowledge and skills to pursue a formal leadership role or trajectory. They are generally recognized by others, peers and superiors alike, as having “leadership potential.” Lastly, they are a high performer in one or more missions of the academic medical center (teaching, research, clinical care). As a result, emerging leaders usually have a sponsor or advocate within the organization that provides them opportunities to participate in leadership activities, to begin developing and honing their skills. More specifically, emerging leaders are individuals in the academic medical center who are either preparing to assume a formal “entry-level” leadership role, or who are in their first few years of having assumed such a role.¹ Examples of these roles include Faculty Senate President, Department or Program Director, Division Chief, Department Chair, or Assistant Dean.

One other common characteristic we have observed about emerging leaders is that at least at the outset of their leadership journey, they often do not possess a formal educational background in leadership or administration. As such, as it pertains to leadership, the emerging leader is often left to “figure it out” on their own. As their journey evolves, the emerging leader may choose to pursue formal education and administrative credentials, (e.g., MBA, MPA, MHA), but early “education” on leadership typically involves some combination of “trial and error,” faculty development programming, profession-sponsored leadership development training, coaching, and mentoring.

This book is not intended as a substitute for formal academic education in leadership and administration. Rather:

The goals of this book are to be a resource for the individual in an academic medical center who wants to pursue a leadership role or is within the first few years of assuming that role, and to provide the new leader guidance to enhance their early leadership career, thus establishing a foundation for a successful leadership journey.

As you start exploring the field of leadership, be warned, there is no end of books, lay articles, and academic publications. A Google search on “leadership” offers over five billion entries! And renowned leadership professor Ralph Stogdill famously pointed out back in 1974 that there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are people who have tried to define it [2]. This pattern has not slowed since, but rather has grown exponentially as colleges and universities around the world continue to expand their leadership faculty, research, and offerings. Since you are at

¹To encompass both conditions of preparing for, or having recently assumed a leadership position, we use the terms “emerging” and “new” to be synonymous throughout the book.