

# Leadership theories and their lessons for pharmacists

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*The most important quality in leadership is being acknowledged as such.*

—Maurois, *The Art of Leadership*

The concept of leadership in pharmacy is widely discussed but not well investigated. A recent search of the subject field of International Pharmaceutical Abstracts with the keywords “leadership” and “leader” resulted in 589 citations. Of these citations, only a handful could be characterized as scholarly articles discussing a theoretical framework or presenting empirical results that might contribute to our basic understanding of leadership. The majority of citations described leaders, spoke about the importance of leadership, or presented opinions on how to increase leadership.

The lack of theoretically based scholarship on leadership in pharmacy may result from a basic unfamiliarity of pharmacists with leadership theories. Most pharmacy textbooks skip the topic of leadership or provide only a superficial discussion. Finding discussions of leadership theories requires a visit to the nursing or allied health care literature.

Without a thorough understanding of leadership concepts, pharmacist leaders are likely to make preventable mistakes that may result in their being resisted or ignored. These leaders may also make poor decisions that are based on incorrect assump-

tions about leadership processes, resulting in conflict and lowered productivity and morale.

This article summarizes leadership theories and offers pharmacists lessons that can increase leadership effectiveness.

## Leadership defined

One of the best definitions of “leadership” is “the process through which an individual attempts to intentionally influence another individual or group in order to accomplish a goal.”<sup>1</sup> Leadership is a process because it is a series of actions exerted by individuals to accomplish goals. Leadership is intentional because it does not just happen; it requires effort on the part of a leader. Leadership requires that the leader exert influence; it does not relinquish influence to followers or to chance. Individuals who do not exert influence are not leaders.

## Leadership and the use of power

A fundamental element of leadership is power, or the ability to influence. Leaders influence others by exerting different types of power available to them, and individuals become leaders through their will-

ingness and ability to wield that power. The more power one has, the more influence and ability to lead.

However, the ability to influence is not enough. Some people choose not to use their power to influence change. Many pharmacy managers and pharmacists refuse to use the power available to them to improve their practice settings and help their patients. Instead, they conclude that they are powerless to affect the world around them.

## Types of power

The power to lead others comes from many sources. Within an organization, there are six commonly recognized types of power: formal, reward, coercive, expert, charismatic, and informational.<sup>2,3</sup>

**Formal power.** Formal power (also called legitimate power) is the power bestowed on a person in the form of positional authority. For example, when a pharmacist is made director of pharmacy, the organization gives him or her authority to hire and fire, make budgetary decisions, and set policy within the department. This power is used to accomplish organizational goals. In the hierarchy of a health system, a pharmacy director has more formal power than a staff pharmacist, and a staff pharmacist has more formal power than a technician.

**Reward power.** Reward power is the ability to reward people who act in a desired manner. People with formal power in organizations often

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have the authority to reward the behaviors of individuals with pay raises, promotions, and praise.

People without formal authority can also use rewards to influence others. For example, a subordinate may compliment a leader for gaining a pay raise for employees. The compliment can cause the leader to fight harder for employee pay raises in the future.

Reward power depends greatly on how a reward is valued by the individual being influenced. For instance, a pharmacist whose financial situation is precarious is more subject to influence by monetary rewards than one who is more financially secure. If a leader cannot provide a desired reward to a follower, then reward power is minimal.

**Punishment power.** The power to punish (also called coercive power), like reward power, usually accompanies formal authority in organizations. Punishments exercised by managers range from mild warnings to job termination. Punishment power is used to discourage undesired behaviors.

Although subordinates cannot formally punish a manager, they can punish a manager by withholding information, avoiding interactions with the manager, spreading rumors or negative stories, and even reprimanding the manager. For example, a subordinate may confront a manager regarding excessive criticism and lack of accessibility or support.

**Expert power.** Expert power derives from the expertise of a person who has special knowledge, skills, and experience. Expertise can be traded for influence. For example, individuals with computer expertise often exert tremendous power within health care organizations because of the reliance on information systems. Pharmacists exert expert power within health care systems through their knowledge of drugs and drug therapy.

**Charismatic power.** Charismatic power (also called referent power) is an individual's ability to influence

another by force of character or charisma. People who are admired by others are able to exert influence through a desire of followers to emulate or please them. Charismatic power is another source of power that is not exclusive to managers. Mahatma Gandhi was one of the great leaders of the 20th century, but he never held a formal leadership position.

**Information power.** Information power comes from the possession of critical information needed by others. It differs from expert power, which deals with abilities and expertise. In this information age, a person who controls information can exert considerable power. For instance, savvy pharmacists and managers cultivate information sources in organizations who can inform them about organizational politics and upcoming events. This information is often critical to the success of pharmacy initiatives.

#### Leadership without formal authority

Formal power is just one of many sources of power available to leaders. Although a formal title can enhance the ability to reward, punish, and exercise information power, it does not make a person a leader. In the words of Maxwell,<sup>4</sup> "The only thing a title can buy is a little time—either to increase your level of influence with others or to erase it." If that time is poorly used, people will increasingly resist individuals in formal positions of authority.

Leadership must be earned. Pharmacists who are placed in a formal position of authority, such as assistant director, have very little power to influence others if they do not effectively use the various forms of power available to them. The ability to lead is based on the perceptions of others. If people believe that a leader has power, then they will choose to follow.

Similarly, people do not have to be in a formal managerial position to

lead. Without a managerial title, staff pharmacists can still use power to influence change in organizations. In many pharmacy organizations, informal leaders often wield substantial power. In my first pharmacy job, at a hospital in Chicago, the initiative to provide clinical pharmacy services on the nursing units came not from the pharmacy director or supervisors but from a handful of pharmacists who were able to gain support from the director, supervisors, and administrators.

#### Differences between leadership and management

Leadership and management are two distinct activities, but the concepts are often confused. Both leaders and managers are necessary for organizational success, and they both attempt to influence behavior. However, they differ in how they attempt to influence behavior.

Management provides order and control in the activities of an organization, which are critical to day-to-day operations. Management works best when conditions are calm and change is unnecessary. Leadership is important when things are changing and chaotic. Furthermore, leadership is critical to providing vision and direction to an organization, and it inspires followers to do more than they thought was possible.

According to Kotter,<sup>5</sup> managers excel at providing order and consistency, planning, budgeting, organizing, staffing, controlling, and problem solving. Leaders excel at coping with change, setting direction for others, communicating a common vision, and motivating and inspiring followers. Leadership focuses on getting people to commit to a common goal, while management focuses on getting people to take action toward that goal. A manager is primarily interested in compliance by subordinates. In fact, a manager may not care whether people want to do something—only that they do it. On

the other hand, a leader wants commitment. A leader is interested not only in behavior but also in feelings, motivations, thoughts, and perceptions. Since mental processes are so integral to behavior, they are necessary to bring about maximum effort in workers. If leaders can capture the hearts of workers, then greater commitment to goals and tasks will result.

When a manager asks the pharmacy staff to complete a task, the rewards and punishments that back up the request will in many cases be sufficient to get the task completed acceptably. The staff may not be inspired to do more than is minimally necessary, though.

However, a motivational system based on reward and punishment may not help the staff to rise to the challenge of extraordinary or changing conditions. For example, budget cuts and staff shortages may require significantly greater effort by the staff with no increase in pay and a deterioration in working conditions. Stress, uncertainty, anxiety, and conflict can complicate the situation. Responding under these conditions often takes more commitment to the pharmacy organization than is generally inspired by a manager. Commitment is better “fired up” by a leader who has gained the trust and respect of followers.

I once worked in a well-managed organization that nevertheless had low employee morale and weak commitment. The person in charge was an excellent manager but a poor leader. The manager was good at inventory control, managing departmental finances, ensuring sufficient staffing, providing clear policies and procedures, and even negotiating good salaries for the staff. However, the manager did things that gave others the impression—whether correct or not—that he cared little for the staff. He failed to support the staff when they exercised professional judgment or took initiative. He shot down new ideas without explana-

tion. He was inconsistent in dealing with employees: One day he would be very understanding, the next he would be inflexible, even harsh. He would encourage staff input and then cut it off. The employees stayed in their jobs but were rarely inspired in their work.

### Leadership theories

Health care researchers and practitioners use leadership theories to answer the following questions: (1) What do you look for if you want to select an effective leader? (2) What behaviors should you try to improve if you want to improve your own leadership effectiveness? (3) Under what conditions do different leadership behaviors work best? The leadership theories that have been proposed can be categorized as trait, behavioral, and situational theories.

**Trait theory.** Trait theory argues that the greatest predictors of leadership effectiveness and success are the traits and dispositions with which people are endowed at birth or develop early in life.<sup>2</sup> By the time a person reaches a leadership position, these characteristics are difficult to obtain or to change.

Not so long ago, people believed that leadership was hereditary. If individuals had royal blood, they were thought to have a capacity to lead. Over time, objective observers noticed that royal bloodlines bore little relationship to the ability to lead.

The first systematic attempt to understand leadership attempted to identify specific traits in people that might be predictive of leadership capability. It was believed that if these traits were identified, they could be used to screen for good leaders. For example, leaders might be selected on the basis of IQ, if IQ could be shown to consistently predict good leadership ability.

Thousands of studies have explored physical, social, personality, and task-related traits in leaders. The traits studied include physical traits,

such as height, age, and attractiveness; social traits, such as charisma, charm, tact, and popularity; personality traits, such as adaptability, assertiveness, and emotional stability; and task-related traits, such as the drive to excel, accept responsibility, and take initiative. A review of all of these studies suggests that the most desirable traits in leaders are drive, motivation, integrity, self-confidence, intelligence, and knowledge.<sup>6,7</sup>

Lord et al.<sup>8</sup> observed that the relationship between these traits and leadership capabilities is weak and inconsistent at best, making many traits poor predictors of good leaders. For instance, many people who are intelligent and have a high level of integrity are poor leaders, and not all good leaders are especially intelligent, tactful, or personable. Since traits are not consistent predictors of leadership, researchers started to examine the role of leadership behaviors.

**Behavioral theory.** The behavioral perspective argues that the greatest predictors of leadership effectiveness are the behaviors and abilities that people learn over time.<sup>1</sup> Personal traits and dispositions provide the foundation on which those behaviors and abilities are developed. Behavioral theories attempt to answer the question, What behaviors should leaders adopt to be most effective? A variety of behavioral theories have been proposed,<sup>9-12</sup> but all describe two primary dimensions of behavior that leaders adopt, task orientation and follower orientation. For task-oriented leaders, the focus is on accomplishing the assigned job, while concerns about followers take a back seat. Task-oriented leaders work to provide the necessary structure to followers by setting goals, providing training, defining expectations and limits on behavior, and establishing rules and procedures.

For most tasks, leaders need to provide some structure. However, there is a point where structure is no longer useful and becomes restrictive

and even irritating. If a pharmacist has just given a technician a job to do, the technician will probably expect the pharmacist to define the general procedure and expected outcomes for the task and later check up to see if the task was accomplished. However, if the pharmacist checks up on the technician every three minutes and continually provides advice or suggestions, the technician will probably find the guidance overbearing. The technician may conclude that the pharmacist does not trust the tech's competence.

Follower-oriented leaders focus less on the job at hand and express greater concern for the follower. Such leaders actively support followers not as cogs in a machine but as human beings. These leaders demonstrate such behaviors as showing respect, gaining trust, demonstrating consideration, and being friendly and approachable.

Both orientations are necessary in organizations, but too much structure will cause followers to feel abused and taken advantage of, and too much emphasis on the followers will result in failure to meet deadlines and goals. Most leaders try to balance a task orientation with a follower orientation.

**Situational theory.** According to situational theory, the greatest predictor of leadership effectiveness and success is the situation in which a leader finds himself or herself.<sup>2</sup> Traits, abilities, and behaviors are important, but they are seen as situation specific. In one circumstance, certain traits and behaviors serve a leader well, while in another they may be disastrous. Situational theory attempts to develop an understanding about how leaders can and should adapt to the dynamics of a leadership situation. Although individual situational theories vary in content and emphasis,<sup>13-16</sup> they generally agree that the appropriate leadership style depends on the job, the followers, the relationship be-

tween the leader and the led, organizational constraints, and the leader's abilities.

**The nature of the job.** Jobs can be routine or nonroutine, structured or unstructured. Routine, structured tasks require a different form of leadership than nonroutine, unstructured tasks. Routine, structured tasks like those in fast-food restaurants do not require much commitment from employees. These employees are trained to follow explicit instructions on cooking food and serving customers. Each employee is expected to complete clearly defined, simplified tasks and is discouraged from making any independent decisions. A far greater level of commitment is necessary in professional work settings like pharmacies, where pharmacists work independently to solve complex problems.

**Follower characteristics.** Some followers are highly motivated, energetic, willing to accept responsibility, and competent. These workers need little direction and structure in their jobs, while unmotivated and less capable people require close oversight and direction.

**Relationship between leader and followers.** Trust is essential to a leader's success. A good leader inspires confidence in and loyalty toward the leader.

**Organizational constraints.** Many organizations, including pharmacies, place many constraints on leaders. Leaders are often hindered in their ability to hire, fire, discipline, and reward staff members.

**The leader's abilities.** Some leaders are more capable and experienced in dealing with leadership situations than others. A leader's ability to adapt to changing situations by applying different leadership strategies will permit him or her to adjust to different jobs, followers, and organizational constraints.

Leaders have little control over many leadership situations. For the most part, leaders cannot substantially change the nature of the job, the characteristics of the followers, or

the organizational constraints. Most pharmacy leaders "inherit" their workers and are given tasks that must be accomplished within the constraints of the organization. According to situational theory, leadership success depends more on the leader's ability to adapt to a situation than the ability to change it.

### Styles of leadership

Six basic leadership styles that can be applied to changing work situations have been identified: the coercive, transformational, affiliative, democratic, pacesetter, and coaching styles.<sup>17</sup>

**The coercive style.** A coercive (or directive) leadership style uses rewards and punishments to influence behavior.<sup>14</sup> This type of leader has a task orientation rather than a follower orientation and is controlling of others. Of all leadership styles, the coercive style appears to be the least effective in the most situations.<sup>17</sup> Coercive leaders tend to create an "us-versus-them" environment in which followers feel manipulated and disrespected. Followers become frightened or resentful and avoid enthusiastic participation in new initiatives or programs because they do not want to make mistakes or feel that their input is not appreciated. Instead, they wait for the leader to tell them what to do and are likely to say, "I just do what I'm told."

Although considered ineffective in most situations, coercive leadership can succeed in crises, such as when a business is failing and people need to be frightened into changing their work practices. Fear can be a potent motivator in getting people to change entrenched behaviors. For some employees, a threat of suspension or termination may be the only way to change poor work habits. However, even under these conditions, coercive leadership should be used sparingly and for limited periods.<sup>17</sup>

**The transformational style.** The transformational style mobilizes

people toward a vision articulated by a leader.<sup>18</sup> Transformational leaders rely on charismatic power, not rewards and punishments, to influence others. They influence others because followers identify with them and their message. Martin Luther King is an example of a transformational leader. King had a dream of what society could be like in America, and through actions and words he inspired millions to make that dream their own.

Of the six leadership styles, the transformational style has been found to be most effective in the greatest number of situations.<sup>17</sup> Transformational leaders can improve communication between leaders and followers because they inspire people by clearly defining how their work fits into a larger vision for the organization. Transformational leaders help followers understand that their jobs matter to the realization of the vision and why. This, in turn, maximizes the commitment of followers to the vision and energizes them to seek the best path for achieving the vision. Feedback from the leader focuses less on the process of achieving goals and more on the outcomes. This encourages people to innovate and take risks.

The transformational style can fail when the leader is seen as pompous or out of touch. Such a leader will not be able to inspire others.

**The affiliative style.** The affiliative leadership style focuses more on the follower than the task.<sup>14</sup> It attempts to keep followers happy and meet their emotional needs. The affiliative leader influences primarily through positive rather than negative feedback. A few pharmacy managers assume that positive feedback will cause employees to slack off in their work, so they offer only criticism. In reality, positive feedback can enhance productivity by enhancing communication, loyalty, trust, and innovation.

At the same time, overreliance on the affiliative style can have negative

effects. Followers who hear only praise will not know when they need to improve their behavior. Poor performance can go uncorrected if followers feel that mediocrity is acceptable. From behavioral leadership theory, we know that followers need structure as well as support from leaders. Therefore, affiliative leaders might wish to combine this style with other leadership styles that offer greater structure, such as transformational leadership.

**The democratic style.** Leaders who practice the democratic style give followers a say in decisions that affect their work lives. This approach generates a sense of ownership by the staff in an organization's goals, nurtures the generation of ideas, and helps build trust and respect. On the other hand, democracy can be very inefficient if people debate trivial issues. Another pitfall is use of the democratic style to avoid making difficult decisions and to shift potential blame for bad results to workers. Democratic leadership is less effective in times of crisis or when followers lack the qualifications to help with the decision. The democratic style works optimally when the best course is uncertain and followers are sufficiently competent to contribute.

**The pacesetting style.** Pacesetting leaders set extremely high performance standards for both followers and themselves.<sup>14</sup> The leader leads by example, demonstrating effort and sacrifice and asking the same of others. If the leader puts in long hours or gives up weekends for work-related projects, the leader expects everyone else to do the same. Followers who cannot keep up with the leader are replaced by others who will.

Pacesetting leaders are often praised in popular press for their successes, and the pacesetting style is adopted by many pharmacy leaders. I once had dinner with a pharmacist leader who declared, "Anyone who does not commit 70 hours per week

to their job is just a parasite on the organization." His favorite leader was former Chrysler Chairman Lee Iacocca, a well-known pacesetter.

The pacesetting style can have very negative effects on morale and performance.<sup>17</sup> Demands for total job commitment can seem unreasonable and overwhelming to followers, especially those whose compensation is nowhere near that of their leaders. Also, pacesetters tend to be unclear about exactly what performance is expected of others. They say, "You need to pick up the pace" without saying what that means. Worse, it can be hard to know when the pacesetter is satisfied. When subordinates increase their efforts, the pacesetting leader may observe, "You need to do more."

The pharmacist leader whose model was Iacocca was never satisfied with the productivity of his employees. He criticized them for not meeting his productivity standards and continually pressured them to work after their shift ended. He thought nothing of calling departmental meetings on weekends or after hours. As a result, employee morale dropped and turnover soared.

The style can be effective in fields with self-motivated and highly competent followers who need little direction to complete tasks. Examples include professional sports and medicine. Michael Jordan is a pacesetting leader who has had tremendous success leading other highly motivated basketball players.

**The coaching style.** Coaching leaders strive to develop the abilities of their followers so that they can work more independently and effectively toward organizational goals. They help workers to set goals and achieve them through career development, training, and skill development. Coaches work cooperatively with the staff to improve productivity and performance, and they provide them with the tools necessary to attain success. They challenge follow-

ers and delegate tasks to them that help develop their skills.

Coaching can be a very effective leadership style, but it is often underutilized because managerial demands often do not permit leaders sufficient time for the slow and laborious work involved.<sup>17</sup> In many cases, it is easier for leaders to do a task themselves than teach others to do it. However, when subordinates learn a new skill, it can free up leaders for other commitments. People who are taught to do something can take over the responsibility for it. They may even do a better job at it than the leader.

Coaches do better with followers who are motivated to improve their performance and mature enough to accept feedback. Coaching does not work as well when followers resist change or new ideas. It can also be ineffective in a crisis, when quick actions are necessary.

### Leaders need many styles

The more leadership styles a person masters, the better he or she can adapt to changing leadership situations. Leaders who have mastered four or more styles—especially the transformational, democratic, affiliative, and coaching styles—tend to establish and maintain the best working environment and show better business performance.<sup>17</sup> Equally important to mastery of the style is the ability to switch among them as the situation demands.

Some leaders adapt to their leadership deficiencies by finding environments that match their styles and abilities. For example, a coercive leader might try to find a situation in which the staff prefers lots of structure and the tasks are routine and standardized. A democratic leader might seek followers who are participative and tasks that fits that style. The problem is that situations constantly change. Several famous wartime leaders, including Ulysses S. Grant, Winston Churchill, and George S. Patton, failed as peacetime

leaders because they were unable to adapt their leadership to the new environment.

Other leaders adapt by finding subordinates who complement their abilities. In other words, they find people who have abilities that they lack. For instance, a leader who is not a “people person” may try to delegate sensitive personnel issues to subordinates with good interpersonal skills. The major problem with this solution is that it forces the leader to rely on others to do what may be the leader’s job. When key subordinates are not available or they leave for other jobs, the leader is left in a difficult position.

A better solution may be to develop the ability to apply multiple leadership styles to different situations. This requires the leader to identify different leadership situations and apply the appropriate styles. It also requires the leader to expand his or her repertoire of leadership styles as much as possible.

### Developing leadership abilities

It is widely accepted that people can learn to increase their capacity to lead. According to Maxwell,<sup>4</sup> as people develop their leadership skills, they pass through four phases. In phase 1, “unaware and ineffective,” people have underdeveloped leadership skills. They may have strong opinions and be quick to offer advice, but they have done very little leading themselves and have little understanding of what it takes to lead others. These people have marginal impact on what goes on around them. Unless they develop their leadership skills, they will continue to be unaware and ineffective.

In phase 2, “aware and ineffective,” people have accepted leadership roles and found out how hard it is to be a good leader. They make many mistakes and are relatively ineffective. At this point, some people get frustrated and choose to avoid leadership. Others decide to develop

more leadership skills and become increasingly effective at influencing others.

People in phase 3, “aware and effective,” must work hard to apply their leadership skills, but doing so makes them steadily more effective.

In phase 4, “unaware and effective,” leadership is less a conscious act and more a part of a person’s work life. Leadership becomes automatic, but the impact is tremendous.

### Role of emotional intelligence

Researchers have identified emotional intelligence (EI) as critical to leadership.<sup>19</sup> EI comprises self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. These qualities help confer the ability to apply different leadership styles to different situations. The greater the EI, the larger the number of leadership styles that can be appropriately applied. Leaders who are deficient in certain components of EI are likely to be less effective in applying certain styles. For example, a leader who lacks empathy will have difficulty using the affiliative style, while one who has poor social skills may not effectively use the coaching or democratic style.

Improving leadership requires identifying which EI components are lacking and developing strategies for improving them. A leader who lacks the ability to use the affiliative style might attempt to learn empathetic listening and relationship building. Of course, that is easier said than done, but it is possible to cultivate greater EI and consequently improve leadership. In fact, many chief executive officers of large corporations employ personal coaches to enhance their EI.<sup>20</sup>

Pharmacists can increase their EI by identifying and working with a mentor early in their careers, becoming a thoughtful student of leadership, practicing leadership whenever possible and analyzing outcomes, and maintaining self-awareness.

### Conclusion

Leadership has many sources of power and many styles. Leadership is a skill that can be developed by those with the necessary initiative and courage. Many problems faced by the pharmacy profession could be improved if more pharmacists would exercise leadership at different levels of health care organizations. Pharmacists who are already good leaders can serve the profession well by helping to nurture leadership abilities in others.

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