

3 Ways Leaders Can Ace Change Management

Written by Lindsey Dunn ([Twitter](#) | [Google+](#)) | May 17, 2014

Change management is one of the most important skills a healthcare leader needs for the future, said Quint Studer, founder of Studer Group, in a session at the Becker's Hospital Review 5th Annual Meeting in Chicago on May 16.

Yet, most health systems devote few resources to developing change management skills among its senior leaders and middle management. This is worrisome, but also provides a potential competitive advantage for healthcare providers — the most successful health systems in the future will be those that manage change effectively.

How does a leader manage change effectively?

While there is numerous research on the subject, there are a three, straightforward things leaders can do that can help successfully impact change, said Mr. Studer.

1. Communicate urgency. Studer Group research has shown that senior leaders perceive the need for change as much more urgent than middle managers and front-line workers. A key tenet of successful change is communicating urgency, so that the organization can adapt at the pace needed.

2. Give support and allow time to develop skills. Employees at all levels transition through three phases of development, according to Mr. Studer: unconsciously unskilled, consciously unskilled and consciously skilled. The first category describes employees who don't yet know they are lacking certain competencies, the second category describes those who have realized they need to develop additional skills, and the last is those who have obtained the needed skills.

Even for high performers need support and training for developing new skills, and providing it is important to successful change management. "Why do even the highest performers in healthcare dislike change?" asked Mr. Studer. "Because high performers hate going backwards."

3. Accept, and even embrace, continuous change. One of the biggest challenges for change management in healthcare is the shift from episodic to continuous change. Take for example budgeting. Most hospitals' budgets vary frequently due to volume, acuity and payer mix.

"Budgets are good for around 30 days," said Mr. Studer, which means managers must be able to adjust priorities and plans frequently and as smoothly as possible.

"I don't have an episodic budget, I have a continuous budget," said Mr. Studer. "That's a change that causes stress in a middle manager."

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