

Harnessing Diverse Leadership Talent Through Sponsorship

Diane L. Dixon, EdD, and Brett D. Lee, PhD, FACHE

Sponsorship is a way to foster diverse leadership talent and prepare individuals for advancement to the executive level. Although many healthcare organizations have a stated goal of enhancing diversity at the executive level, executing effectively on this goal often remains a challenge and an opportunity. The percentages of diverse executive leaders, especially people from various racial and ethnic backgrounds, women, and other underrepresented groups, remain low in comparison with the populations that health systems serve.

Making a commitment to strategically develop diverse talent can produce tangible benefits for organizational performance. Diverse leadership teams can advance that commitment by enhancing relationships in the communities they serve, attracting diverse talent at all levels and making health equity a strategic priority. Organizations with greater leadership diversity have higher performance on key operational metrics, improved decision-making and increased innovation, according to research conducted by McKinsey & Company, the results of which were published in a report, *Diversity wins: How inclusion matters*, in May 2020.

When CEOs and other senior executives embrace sponsorship as a key component of a comprehensive approach to leadership development, they can play a significant role in harnessing diverse leadership talent.

Sponsorship Defined

Sponsorship is a professional relationship in which senior leaders engage in dedicated actions to advocate for and advance the careers of high-potential talent. It is a two-way relationship between the sponsor and a talented up-and-comer that involves other influential leaders who can provide that individual with leadership opportunities and experience. There is reciprocity between the sponsor and protégé with a return on the investment. The sponsor advances his or her own leadership by developing diverse talent bench strength, and the emerging leader delivers high performance that benefits the organization.

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LEADING WELL

Our Evolving Workforce: Seizing Change to Advance Progress

Melinda L. Estes, MD

In a 1962 essay in *The New York Times*, writer James Baldwin made the simple but inspired observation, “Not everything that is faced can be changed; but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

He was discussing a writer’s responsibility during a time of great change in America’s history. Today, we can see another truth in Baldwin’s observation as it relates to our overwhelmingly fatigued system of care, and all we’ve endured and learned during the past two years.

All healthcare executives can easily remember in 2018 when we thought we were managing overwhelming staffing challenges. But now, more than two years into this pandemic, one in five of our healthcare colleagues have left the field. That’s half a million jobs. And it doesn’t stop there.

With critical shortages in nursing school resources and faculty, we’re

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CEO RESEARCH FINDINGS

Results by ACHE's Executive Office, Research

Challenges in Addressing Job Stress for Leaders

Healthcare worker burnout has become a critical issue for healthcare organizations, and creating a resilient workforce has become a focus for many. There have been numerous studies of burnout among physicians, nurses and other front-line healthcare workers.

In June 2021, ACHE collaborated with **Thom A. Mayer, MD, FACHE**, founder, BestPractices, medical director, NFL Players Association and executive vice president, Leadership, LogixHealth, Bedford, Mass; and Stanford University researchers **Tait Shanafelt, MD**, Jeanie & Stewart Ritchie Professor of Medicine and chief wellness officer, Stanford Medicine, director, WellMD Center, and associate dean, Stanford School of

Medicine; and **Mickey Trockel, MD, PhD**, clinical associate professor, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Stanford School of Medicine, to examine burnout and other stress-related symptoms among healthcare leaders. A survey was sent to 5,670 ACHE members holding positions of department head/director and above in healthcare provider organizations. Of those, 1,269 responded, resulting in a 22% response rate among eligible respondents who received the survey.

One-third (33%) of leaders responding to the survey had burnout scores that fell into the high range. The study examined which behaviors aimed at addressing job stress were difficult for leaders to perform. The results are shown in the table below.

Other research, including studies among physicians, have shown that while there are things individuals can do to address their own symptoms of burnout, organizational factors such as leadership and culture can have a significant impact on the levels of this type of fatigue in the workforce.

Healthcare leaders looking to foster engagement among executives in their organizations might consider how organizational practices, expectations and norms may be affecting the rates of leader burnout.

ACHE thanks the hospital CEOs who responded to this survey for their time, consideration, and service to their profession and to healthcare leadership research.

Behaviors for Addressing Job Stressors	Percent of Leaders Reporting Difficulty With Performing Behavior (N=1,181)
Unplug from email or other work communication during time off	70%
Take breaks or moments of respite during the day	53%
Take vacations or time to do other things I enjoy	51%
Keep work hours to healthy levels	49%
Take care of my own health	46%
Finding someone to talk with about the issues I face as a leader	43%
Take time for family or other meaningful relationships in my life	35%
Recognize when I am stressed	32%
Delegate and trust others to do things correctly in my absence or to decrease my workload	30%
I do not have difficulty addressing job stress in my life	5%
Other (please specify)	1%



Resilient Leadership In Crisis and Into the Future



Warner L. Thomas, FACHE, CPA, is president/CEO, Ochsner Health, Louisiana's largest clinically integrated, nonprofit academic health system with a network of 40 hospitals and nearly 200 total sites of care throughout Louisiana and Mississippi.

Thomas began working at Ochsner Health in 1998 as president/COO before assuming his current role in 2012. A board member of the American Hospital Association and Baylor Scott & White Holdings Board of Trustees, he is also a former member of the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission and served as chairman of AHA's Association Section for Health Systems Governing Council.

In 2018, he received the Anti-Defamation League—A.I. Botnick Torch of Liberty Award and was named one of Glassdoor's "Top CEOs." He was also recognized as one of *Modern Healthcare's* "Top 100 Most Influential People in Healthcare" in 2019, and he has received the Boy Scouts of America Distinguished Citizen Award.

Thomas received an MBA from Boston University Graduate School of Management and a bachelor's degree in accounting and computer information systems from New Hampshire College, Manchester.

What does it mean to be a resilient leader in today's healthcare environment? It's about managing challenges and adversities while positioning your organization for the future, and being optimistic to help people see the opportunity ahead. It's also about confronting difficult realities and clearly and transparently communicating those so everyone understands where the organization is going. Lastly, it is about taking care of yourself and exhibiting that self-care to help others lead effectively.

Why is resilient leadership important in responding to crises and in recovering and rebooting post-pandemic? It's more important today than ever given the challenges of the pandemic, workforce issues and the unprecedented stress caregivers are experiencing. As leaders, our job is to help "fill the tanks" of the people around us, and to ensure they can lead their own teams. Resilient leadership is about giving and helping others to be prepared and supported.

What was one of the greatest challenges you faced as a CEO during the pandemic? During the delta variant surge, we had to postpone other services because we had so many patients with COVID-19 in our facilities. Then, Hurricane Ida hit 15 days after the peak of the surge. It was difficult to manage both crises and keep employees optimistic and focused. A key factor in our ability to do so was constantly communicating with them to offer encouragement and support and reinforce that what they do matters to the communities we serve. We tied our messages and actions to our purpose: "patients first, people always." This means we are always supporting our people and team members so they can put our patients first every day. Tying our messaging and communication to our purpose was critical to helping our team see the reason for their hard work.

How can healthcare CEOs build on lessons learned from the pandemic and other crises to foster resilience and other key traits long-term? The uncertainty and ambiguity of these times have had a significant impact on morale and added to the staffing challenges we already faced. I think some people are leaving jobs simply because it's something they can control at a time when they have little to no control of many other factors. Looking ahead, having workplace flexibility with remote and hybrid options will be key to better meeting our employees' needs. As leaders, it's important to recognize that what works for you may not work for someone else.

How has ACHE helped you to be resilient? Being part of ACHE has broadened my horizons and given me community. The network with whom I connect and learn from definitely helps me to be resilient. I appreciate the educational opportunities and content ACHE offers. Reading and learning from those resources and connecting with my peers has added to my knowledge and helped grow my understanding of the healthcare landscape beyond my own experience.



RECOMMENDED READING

Managing Healthcare Ethically—Bundle

The numerous and complex issues that healthcare executives encounter every day are an intrinsic part of organizational life. Many of these issues have significant ethical dimensions. Edited by Paul B. Hofmann, DrPH, LFACHE, and William A. Nelson, PhD, HFACHE, the three separate volumes that constitute the third edition of *Managing Healthcare Ethically* build upon the two previous editions. *Leadership Roles and Responsibilities* is the first of these three volumes. *Organizational Concerns*, the second volume, focuses on organizational ethics, management and policies. The third volume, *Clinical Challenges*, addresses ethical challenges related to clinical care.



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TREND TRACKER

Nearly all healthcare leaders (98%) say their organization either has or is planning to implement an artificial intelligence strategy, including 48% who have implemented one already, reveals a survey of 500 senior healthcare industry executives conducted by Wakefield Research for Optum. Additionally, 94% agree that they have a duty to ensure responsible use of AI. Other key findings are that 99% of executives surveyed expect the strategy to yield tangible cost savings, and that a majority of healthcare leaders (55%) believe AI will create opportunities for employees,

with 72% trusting AI to manage administrative tasks to make those employees' lives easier. Furthermore, 96% of leaders say AI plays an important role in achieving healthcare equity goals, and 99% believe AI can be trusted in healthcare. Finally, 89% agree that the challenges using AI require a healthcare-focused company to address them.

These findings are based on the 4th Annual Optum Survey on AI in Health Care. The 500 senior healthcare industry executives surveyed are defined as those above the vice president level working in

the healthcare industry, and include C-suite-level titles and 100 state and federal health officials. The survey was conducted Aug. 9–23, 2021, using an email invitation and an online survey.
optum.com/business

Telehealth use grew nationally 7,060% from 2019 to 2020, an increase driven by the COVID-19 pandemic and the limits imposed on certain in-office services, coupled with the greater risk of infection from in-person encounters, according to the fifth annual FAIR Health Report. FAIR Health is a

Trend Tracker (continued)

national, independent nonprofit organization dedicated to bringing transparency to healthcare costs and health insurance information through data products, consumer resources and health systems research support. Key findings from its latest white paper, published March 31, 2022, include a rise in telehealth unseen in previous years. Telehealth use increased nationally 41,919% from 2015 to 2020, a more than 40-fold increase over the growth of 1,019% from 2014 to 2019, reported in last year's edition. Additionally, in all other places of service studied for changes in use, utilization decreased from 2019 to 2020, probably because of the impact of COVID-19. Use fell 38% in ambulatory surgery centers, 30% in ERs, 16% in urgent care centers and 4% in retail clinics. The paper also found that among the places of service studied, telehealth held the highest percentage of medical

claim lines in 2020, with 15.41% of all medical claim lines nationally. The comparable percentages for the other places of service were 2.07% for ERs, 1.31% for urgent care centers, 0.64% for ASCs and 0.05% for retail clinics.

Since FAIR Health released its first edition of the report, the healthcare sector has continued to evolve and grow more complex, and healthcare stakeholders continue to need information that will enable them to discern fundamental trends and patterns, and to make decisions on that basis. This report is intended to serve all such constituents, including hospitals and health systems. The report uses data from FAIR Health's database of over 36 billion claim records, which are contributed by payers and administrators who insure or process claims for private insurance plans.

fairhealth.org

Our Evolving Workforce (continued from Page 1)

also now seeing our pipeline of future nurses dry up. Because, even though 2020 had an increase in nursing school enrollments, the fact is that more than 80,000 qualified applicants were not accepted that same year, largely due to faculty shortages. Tragically, that now means there are fewer master's and doctoral program students and graduates, leading to even greater staffing and faculty shortages to come. It's a hole too deep to climb out of using the same old tools. We need new tools. Or, even better, we need a whole new workshop.

Finding a New Path Forward

Author and alternative medicine advocate Deepak Chopra once said, "All great changes are preceded by chaos." Chaos we've had. Now it's time for great changes. To protect the quality of care for our patients, we must evolve. To deliver promising and well-balanced career paths for our shrinking workforce, we must find a new path forward. And it's up to us to usher one in.

Looking beyond 2022, we know significant change will not be possible

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2022 CEO Circle Forum

More Than Words: Leveraging Governance and Partnerships to Advance Health Equity

This CEO-exclusive session introduces participants to key partnership opportunities with community groups, public health departments, major employers and health plans as an integral part of their health equity playbook. Attendees will also explore best practices and case studies, providing them with a clear plan of action.

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Harnessing Diverse Leadership Talent Through Sponsorship (continued from Page 1)

Sponsorship Differs From Mentorship

Sponsorship is related to, but different from, mentorship. Mentorship is a professional relationship in which a more experienced individual provides advice, guidance, support and encouragement to enhance the career growth of the mentee. The relationship is between the mentor and mentee and usually does not involve others. A mentor may become a sponsor. As the mentor learns about the mentee's leadership capabilities and potential, they may decide to advocate for their advancement.

Both sponsorship and mentorship are essential for leadership development and advancement, but sponsors take their responsibilities for advancing the careers of others a step further than mentors.

What Sponsors Do

Sponsors move beyond just providing guidance as a mentor to actively making an investment in the experience-driven leadership development of the individual they are sponsoring. This experience-based approach is in line with how leaders tend to learn most effectively. Research on how executives learn and grow indicates that the optimal mix is when 70% of learning comes from experience-driven leadership development, 20% comes from developmental relationships and 10% comes from formal training and education, according to a Nov. 24, 2020, article, "The 70-20-10 Rule for Leadership Development," by the Center for Creative Leadership. Furthermore, research published in the book *Diversity on the Executive Path: Wisdom and Insights for*

Navigating to the Highest Levels of Healthcare Leadership about the career trajectory experiences of racially and ethnically diverse CEOs found that sponsors recommend sponsored individuals for challenging experiences and assignments that facilitate advancement.

In addition, sponsors use their social and political capital to advocate for the up-and-coming leader. They tell other executives about the sponsored individual's leadership capabilities and performance, and they expand their network by connecting them to other senior executives who can potentially influence their advancement.

Sponsors help protégés navigate the political dynamics of the organization and protect them from potentially toxic situations. A good sponsor guides, supports and nurtures the rising leader.

CEO Sponsorship Role

The CEO, working with the executive leadership team, can thoughtfully create an inclusive and equitable organizational culture that makes leadership diversity a strategic priority. Sponsorship programs are still relatively rare in healthcare organizations. As such, the CEO's early efforts may be to educate the leadership team on the role of sponsors and the benefit that a formal sponsorship program can provide to the organization. Sponsorship should be embedded in the broader leadership development strategies so that it has the infrastructure and support systems to be sustainable.

The CEO can also provide guidance on important structural

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without innovation. That means partnering with leading-edge tech companies, startups and established visionaries focused on helping healthcare leaders connect providers with patients, patients with information, and everyone with tools and resources that can help save and improve lives.

By listening with an objective to understand, a leader shows and develops empathy, helping them naturally connect with and effectively lead people.

For years we've known that the future of healthcare would revolve around the convenience and efficiency of care delivered outside hospital walls. But it wasn't until COVID-19—and several emergency Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services waivers put into place—that this barely emerging future became a sudden necessity. Healthcare providers were now not just allowed but expected to expand virtual care services and get creative with how they delivered care safely and remotely.

Saint Luke's Health System in Kansas City, Mo., started by embracing and actively accelerating

the adoption of enhanced digital technology at points of contact in every patient-care setting. The system created a comprehensive and user-friendly digital front door that now welcomes thousands of patients into the Saint Luke's umbrella of care, providing the tools needed to manage their care and meeting their care needs consistently, whether in-person or over a screen.

Increasingly, Saint Luke's is finding the solution is a hybrid one, delivering care virtually and in-person, right where the patient is most comfortable, most able to rest and heal, and most able to get customized care and attention. And, through Saint Luke's Hospital In Your Home—a soon-to-launch program providing care to some high-acuity patients through a hybrid model of virtual technology and visiting, in-person care—we're striving to make home the epicenter of care.

Designed to free more beds for higher-acuity patients, the program will operate with a 24/7 medical command center at its core, comprising administrators, hospitalists, nurses, advanced practice providers, patient champions and tech support.

Although the notion that we're no longer reaching for a sharper or shinier tool may at first seem antithetical to healthcare leaders, it's important to remember that instead, we're building a new workshop.

Representing Change

To build anew requires leaders who not only welcome but also represent

change; they are ready to face new challenges, eager to find solutions, unafraid of risk, daring to strive for constant improvement and leading through a deeper level of listening. They are listening to understand—not respond or act. By listening with an objective to understand, a leader shows and develops empathy, helping them naturally connect with and effectively lead people.

And we should always be mindful that as leaders in times of confusion and fear, the only way through is by staying committed to a culture of communication and transparency. We should be honest about the challenges we're facing and reassuring about how we intend to overcome them with thoughtful, strategic action. And then, we must execute on our plan with excellence.

After all, it's about leading with integrity, with a commitment to always think of our patients and people first. And understanding that the best teams are far more than the sum of their parts, but only if each person strives to consistently deliver with excellence and inspire others to do the same. Or, as the great performer Dolly Parton once said: "If your actions create a legacy that inspires others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, then you are an excellent leader."

And that's what we need: a field of excellent leaders, inspiring more. For our patients, our providers and the healthy evolution of our entire field.

Melinda L. Estes, MD, is president/CEO, Saint Luke's Health System, Kansas City, Mo. (mestes@saint-lukes.org).

questions regarding a sponsorship program. For example, will sponsors be formally assigned to their protégé or will relationships develop organically, and how will these talented individuals be identified and selected? This leadership development practice helps to ensure that there is a talent pipeline with high-potential diverse leaders ready for succession to key leadership positions.

CEOs develop an inclusive and equitable culture that makes sponsorship essential by what they pay attention to, what they routinely talk about, what they measure, what they reward, what they make visible and by being sponsors themselves. By doing so, CEOs set the stage for sponsorship to become an important practice that leaders have accountability for implementing throughout the organization.

Sponsorship Readiness

Engaging in sponsorship is a tremendous responsibility that requires a commitment of time, strategic thinking and personal leadership relationship equity to actively advance the career of others. It requires an even bigger effort to incorporate sponsorship into the organization's leadership development strategy and succession planning. This makes

assessing readiness for sponsorship important.

Here are three questions to initiate that assessment as a CEO:

- Do I believe that harnessing diverse leadership talent is integral to executing the organizational strategy?
- Am I willing to share my time, expertise and political acumen to advance the careers of diverse leaders?
- Do I spend time with the senior leadership team discussing inclusive leadership development strategies and succession planning?

If the responses indicate readiness to improve sponsorship, the CEO and senior leadership team can further assess the current state of sponsorship. With this understanding, the executive team can start developing an improvement action plan.

The Sponsorship Advantage

The CEO is ultimately responsible for creating an inclusive organizational culture in which all people have a fair opportunity to develop their leadership capabilities and experience unbiased career advancement. Because historically underrepresented groups may be less visible

in traditional leadership development talent pools, executives can make a more deliberate commitment to seek out diverse talent and assist this population in navigating the complexities of healthcare organizations.

While there may be some initial resistance to investing time and energy, as well as reputation and political capital, to help develop a talented rising leader, the results pay dividends. Sponsors experience great pride and ownership when the protégés with whom they work achieve success, and this can be a powerful retention tool for both the sponsor and the protégé alike. In this time of the "Great Resignation," this is a competitive advantage.

Sponsorship can play a significant role in developing diverse talent that benefits the entire organization. With inclusive leadership, executives create a powerful tapestry of different backgrounds, experiences, lenses and perspectives that can advance the current strategy and foster innovation going forward.

Diane L. Dixon, EdD, is managing principal, D. Dixon & Associates LLC (Diane@ddixon.org). Brett D. Lee, PhD, FACHE, is president, Texas Health Hospital Frisco (brettlee@texashealth.org).



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Editor
Lea Radick

Art Director
Carla Nessa

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