

Guest Author Lee Barbieri: Six Skills of a High Performing Manager

If the topic caught your eye it's likely because medical practice managers are practical people. Our job is to get things done and we do it with a passion for being efficient as well as effective. So you are on the lookout for tips and advice to help you do your job, and (admit it) to confirm that your skills match those of recognized high performers.

But my goal today is to help you value certain skills you already have but may not appreciate their value to you. These are my concepts of valuable skills. I'm going to miss someone's favorite, so when I do, send a comment, list your skill and share your knowledge.

The first skill is thievery; the honest kind.

The best managers I know are quick to recognize an idea and steal it to use in their own practice. We expect to do this at the organized idea swaps we call conferences. But I've watched managers scribble notes at a dinner table or at a sidewalk conversation when another manager offers an idea. Good managers know that a manager-tested idea is worth twice that of a concept proposed in a research article. I'm not denigrating research. I love research; I read journal articles for fun. (My son says that proves only that I am a nerd.) But nothing beats a peer tested concept. So listen carefully to your peers, subscribe to your state and national MGMA listservs and steal those ideas. "; and then pass them along to the rest of us. And ALWAYS give credit to the person whose idea you stole.

The next skill is impatience.

While good managers analyze, research and cogitate looking for a solution, they don't wait for the perfect one. High performing managers instinctively use the try and adjust method, formalized in operational improvement programs as PDCA (Plan, Do, Check or Correct, Act) or **PDSA** (Plan, Do, Study, Act.) They try the best solution at hand, check to see if it is working, adjust it, refine it and then implement it. Then they check it later to see if it is still working. Good managers don't wait for the perfect plan. They go with a good plan and have the courage to improve it on the fly.

High performing managers are patient.

I know what I just told about being impatient, but good managers are patient. They dig deep enough into a problem to know the real causes. They ask why enough to get past the obvious. In Operational Improvement the technique is called The Five Whys. High performing managers use this without even knowing it has a name. It requires patience. It pays big dividends "" fewer wrong moves and less stuff to redo. Those without patience act on the first cause they find, and then have to undo the solution and start over. You may have heard this described as: "There's never time to do it right. There's always time to do it over."□

High performing managers share recognition and accept blame.

This can be tough, especially in a highly competitive profession. Advancement as a healthcare executive often comes when a colleague is replaced. Even if you work in a large organization with clear advancement tracks, you have to

compete for the opportunity. The result is a temptation to avoid blame and to hoard recognition. But the best managers share recognition with their team. They are in touch with their own leaders and keep those leaders aware of their efforts. That is prudent and fair. But no one succeeds without the help of those around them. Good managers recognize that and share credit. As for the blame "" it was your team. If they failed, then you failed as the leader. Accept it, correct it, learn from it and move on. My first mentor reminded me that if I was right one time in three and I was playing baseball, I would have a .333 batting average and be my team's MVP every year.

High performing managers are curious.

The best are curious about everything. The Greek poet Pindar said "There is no knowledge without profit." Good managers consume information. This serves to keep them aware of possibilities that others will miss. It improves their luck factor. It gives them the ability to be first with the great ideas that advance their practices.

High performing managers love to teach. Having knowledge is not nearly as much fun as sharing it. Good managers help their teams improve. They share their knowledge. They are enthusiastic when they do it. They are excited when others gain new skills. It's not totally altruistic either. Skilled teams take on more work, are more efficient and more effective. This creates additional time for the manager to do things beyond extinguishing fires. That's a great thing.

And last, high performing managers are realistic.

They know there are limits to what they can accomplish alone.

They know that life is not all work. The very best find ways to be involved with their community. They make time for their families and friends. They participate in the world around them. They are refreshed by their non-work life, so they can enjoy the work day.

What have I missed? What have you admired in others or found in yourself that are important skills in your success?

Please welcome my long-time colleague and friend Lee Barbieri. I am hoping Lee will be a regular contributor as he has a lot of interesting ideas and experience to share with MMP readers.

Lee Barbieri is a Medical Practice Management Executive with over 25 years experience, and is a graduate of Va Tech, a medical laboratory technologist, MT(ASCP), and an avid reader. Lee has worked in both private practice and in hospital networks, in healthcare IT and has also worked in a university hospital, managing diagnostic laboratory services. Lee says "I am a native of Virginia but I have been a happy North Carolinian for 30 plus years. My wife and I have two sons and four grandchildren. I support my alma mater and still find time to be a Duke Blue Devil fan."

