



Establishing a Common Vision Among Healthcare Providers

BY ELI BECKER AND TERRI ARMSTRONG WELCH

A healthcare network sought to simplify its complex leadership development approach and align leaders across the organization.



THE COMPANY: Valley Children's Healthcare
www.ValleyChildrens.org



THE SUPPLIER: Wiley
www.leadershipchallenge.com

As pioneering leaders in healthcare know, the depth and pace of change affecting how quality care is delivered to those in need is relentless. And staying at the leading edge requires an intentional focus on bringing leaders at every level and function together to help migrate through those changes.

That's a reality that Valley Children's Healthcare has confronted with passion, collaboration, and innovation—values that have propelled this independent nonprofit through six decades of growth to become one of the largest pediatric health networks in the nation. From neonatal intensive care to complex heart surgery, telemedicine, and child advocacy, more than 3,000 staff and 550 physicians bring high-quality pediatric care close to home for 1.3 million Central California children in Valley Children's 45,000-square-mile service area. Strong leadership is now the cornerstone that is driving sustainable change.

Creating a leadership development program for all

Through an enterprise-wide initiative grounded in the works of James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, co-authors of *The Leadership Challenge*, nurses and administration staff are joining forces to craft a common vision and leadership language, and collaborating cross-functionally to reach new heights in ensuring the health and well-being of the children in their care.

"When I first came on board, our leadership development approach was simply too complex," recalls Justina Piercy, manager of workforce engagement and development. "We had 11 leadership characteristics and 20 management competencies. No one could recall the principles. It was clear we needed a program that was more focused, one that would work for physicians and administration alike."

As an experienced leadership coach and 15-year veteran in the learning and development field, Piercy worked with a cross-functional team of physician and administration leaders to bring a leadership framework that would align leaders across the organization—regardless of title, role, or position—and ensure that every voice was represented. After a year of careful evaluation, she and her team proposed Wiley's *The Leadership Challenge*.

“Rather than create something on our own, The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership model appealed to us because it’s evidence-based, backed by over 30 years of research, and has proven success,” Piercy explains. “It just made sense. We asked our leadership team to read the book and it basically sold itself.”

The program development team began working directly with Wiley, who brought in Valarie Willis, a member of its certified master network. Together they began designing a cohesive leadership program that Valley Children’s Healthcare could ultimately operate on its own. Starting with small group presentations, an initial pilot program, and an off-site briefing specifically for the medical group, they gathered input from nurse leaders, various department heads, and physicians across the organization.

“It was important to get everyone’s ideas on what the program should look like to make it truly relevant and, of course, to get buy-in,” Willis says. “Throughout the development phase, we introduced *The Leadership Challenge* and engaged in great dialogue about why leadership is important, especially in today’s ever-changing and demanding healthcare environment. We also explored how The Five Practices—model the way, inspire a share vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart—aligned perfectly with Valley Children’s stated values and commitments. That really seemed to resonate and helped get people on board.”

Better leaders, better teams, delivering the best care

With support from key organizational leaders, The Leadership Challenge—Introductory Class launched to enthusiastic reviews, despite some initial reservations. “Honestly, I was

 NEARLY 95 PERCENT OF THE LEADERSHIP TEAM HAS NOW EXPERIENCED THE PROGRAM; THE POSITIVE IMPACT IS SPREADING.

skeptical,” says Chris Long, executive director of communications and marketing, and a participant of the first session. “I’ve been at Valley Children’s 14 years and we’ve done leadership programs before. The difference this time was that physicians and administration were having leadership discussions together. The opportunity to interact helped me really understand what physicians deal with from a leadership perspective. I think we all developed a new appreciation for every side of the business and realized we’re all walking the same walk, just wearing different hats. It broke down silos.”

From a delivery standpoint, the workforce engagement and development team also had reservations. “We were a bit nervous about what might come up when we brought physicians and administration staff together,” Piercy recalls. “These two groups have typically approached problems differently and we anticipated opposing points of view. But it was refreshing that it ended up being so well received by all parties.”

Engagement in Valley Children’s Leadership Challenge program begins with prework. Participants are tasked with completing the 360-degree Leadership Practices Inventory, providing a self-assessment of their own leadership behaviors, and gathering feedback from peers, direct reports, and supervisors. In the two-day classroom portion that follows, leaders then explore their LPI results and delve into each of The Five Practices to gain insight into their leadership

strengths and develop a plan to improve their effectiveness.

For many Valley Children’s leaders, like Kris Aubry, director of the neonatal intensive care units, the experience is truly eye-opening. “With concrete feedback and practical tools to use myself and with my team, I implemented quarterly staff meetings with physicians and nurses to foster greater transparency and other activities that are helping everyone connect their work back to the organization’s mission and values,” Aubry says.

For John Kinnison, medical director of clinical partnerships and regional hospitalists, the experience helped him understand the need to articulate his vision clearly. He says, “I realized that while I was clear about my vision—to focus on the kids, keeping them healthy and happy—I needed to find a way to take my excitement and communicate it in a way that others could get on board ... to make it a shared vision.”

Focusing on the future—for the children

Nearly 95 percent of the leadership team at Valley Children’s Healthcare has now experienced the program, and the positive impact is spreading.

“Overall, since we embarked on The Leadership Challenge journey, the momentum and engagement among my peers and my team is so much stronger,” Aubry says. “Expectations are clear. A common language means better communication and people are feeling valued. We’re all feeling good about it and the path we’re headed.”

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