Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT

in Nutrition & Dietetics

EDITORS

Julie Grim, MPH, RDN, LD

Susan Renee Roberts, DCN, RDN, LDN, CNSC, FAND

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eat right® Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
120 S. Riverside Plaza, Suite 2190
Chicago, IL 60606

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FOREWORD

Leadership occurs when people reach goals together, and then instinctively gain momentum and continue forward because they are inspired to do so. So get ready to be inspired by this book—it certainly motivated me!

Though we cannot predict the future, we can cocreate it through the continual reflection and development of our own management and leadership skills. Said professional development will be paramount to move the dietetics profession forward through the 21st century.

Appropriate and effective nutrition care does not occur by accident nor by technical abilities alone: it is only possible through financial resource managament, effective leadership and communication, workforce diversity, appropriate use of technology, quality improvement, strategic planning, and more—all key topics that mirror well throughout the chapters in this book. Drawing upon the experiences of distinguished practicing managers and leaders in the nutrition field, this book aims to provide the important whats and whys of applicable leadership and management. Key principles and moments of sage advice are shared through the lenses of those with substantial experience and will offer new perspectives to inspire both current and potential leaders. The book is designed to inform practitioners across a variety of practice settings and organizational structures and will be especially helpful to registered dietitian nutritionists and nutrition and dietetics technicians, registered, at various career stages and transitions. Indeed, this resource is applicable anywhere there are groups of people working hard toward a common cause to improve the human condition through nutrition and care.

I know that you will find *Effective Leadership & Management in Nutrition & Dietetics* to be immediately useful and a source of reference for a successful future. Clearly, this book was written *by leaders for leaders*.

Kevin L. Sauer, PhD, RDN, LD, FAND
Professor, Dietetics
Co-Director, Center for Food Safety in Child Nutrition Programs
Department of Food, Nutrition, Dietetics, and Health
Kansas State University, College of Health and Human Sciences
Past President, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

PREFACE

When we go through training to become registered dietitian nutritionists (RDNs) or nutrition and dietetics technicians, registered (NDTRs), our exposure to leadership and management principles and skills is often limited. When we then find ourselves in a role that requires these skills, it is not always easy to find practical resources to hasten the learning curve. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting challenges in delivering food and nutrition services in dramatically different environments, embracing new technologies, and managing through substantial staffing challenges made the need for effective leaders in our profession even more evident.

Following the success of *The Clinical Nutrition Manager's Handbook: Solutions for the Busy Professional*, we were asked to consider leading a new edition but with a broader focus on management in other settings. This led to discussion of how leadership is critical in all aspects of the profession, including in management roles, and the concept for this book was established. During development, it became clear that an expanded focus on diversity was also essential for nutrition managers and leaders, and an excellent chapter devoted to embracing diversity and embodying inclusive leadership is now included.

Whether you have a formal or informal leadership role, are experienced or early in your career, all dietetics professionals can benefit from useful, applicable information. Leaders can emerge in any environment and work to inspire people. Managers inhabit formal roles within an organization and supervise staff and activities. The two are separate yet complementary. This book is designed to build management and leadership knowledge and skills in key areasincluding negotiation, staff development, budgeting, strategic planning, quality improvement, and regulatory compliance, among others. We hope that it will help you navigate your own distinct career path and assist you with solving common problems you may encounter along the way. In addition, the book features many practical ideas and best practices from a distinguished group of RDN leaders in a variety of professional roles and practice areas.

There are many ways to use this book. You may wish to start at the beginning and read cover to cover. Alternatively, we encourage you to turn to the chapters that are most relevant to your current or desired role or begin with the topics that are least familiar to you. Our hope is that the information in this book will make you more knowledgeable, successful, and effective in your role as a food and nutrition leader.

Julie Grim, MPH, RDN, LD
Susan Renee Roberts, DCN, RDN, LDN, CNSC, FAND

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This book is dedicated to our families who provided unending love and support. We want to express our appreciation to the authors and reviewers for their willingness to give back to their profession by sharing their time and expertise. And finally, we would like to thank the many registered dietitians and other health care professionals who have mentored and encouraged us over the years.

ABOUT THE EDITORS

Julie Grim, MPH, RDN, LD, is a registered dietitian and licensed dietitian/nutritionist with a master's degree in public health and a passion for the role of nutrition in the prevention and management of chronic disease. She has more than 25 years of experience in food and nutrition leadership and health care administration as well as teaching experience at the graduate level. Julie is currently the director of nutrition for the American Diabetes Association. She has served in many national leadership roles for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, including the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND), the Nutrition Care Process Committee, and the Nominating Committee. Julie is the coeditor of the *Clinical Nutrition Manager's Handbook: Solutions for the Busy Professional*. She speaks nationally on leadership development and the role of nutrition in chronic disease prevention. In her spare time, Julie is an organic gardener and an artist. She lives in North Texas and is married with two grown children and one grandson.

Susan Renee Roberts, DCN, RDN, LDN, CNSC, FAND, is a registered and licensed dietitian/nutritionist with a doctorate in clinical nutrition from Rutgers University, and master's and bachelor's degrees from Texas A&M University. She has more than 30 years of experience in the field of dietetics with expertise in oncology, critical care, clinical research, clinical nutrition management, and dietetics education. Susan has served as an educator to graduate, undergraduate, and dietetic internship students and is currently program director for the Coordinated Program in Dietetics at Keiser University in Melbourne, FL. She has held many different leadership roles within the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, including with the Dietitians in Nutrition Support dietetic practice group, the Nominating Committee, the Council on Future Practice, and the Board of Directors. She received the Medallion Award in 2018 and the Excellence in Clinical Practice Award in 2007. Throughout her career, Susan has presented on topics in her areas of expertise and has authored multiple peer-reviewed publications. When not engaged with work or professional activities, she enjoys pickleball and beach walks as well as trying out new recipes. She is married with two grown sons and two adorable dogs.

CHAPTER 1

Leadership Fundamentals

Julie Grim, MPH, RDN, LD

Introduction

Leadership in the dietetics profession (as well as in many professions), although widely discussed, is often poorly understood and not readily embraced. In spite of this, the need for effective leadership in dietetics has never been greater. According to Susan Calvert Finn, former president of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, "Leadership skills are needed in all areas of dietetics to address the big issues of health care facing the world."[1] Changes in health care service and delivery, globalization, enhanced diversity in the work environment, and increases in both nutrition-related chronic disease and the need for sustainable food systems all present opportunities for food and nutrition professionals to step in and lead. Leadership skill and competency development can enable nutrition professionals to be ready when the opportunity arises.

The goal of this chapter is to discuss the core competencies to develop early in your career to maximize your current and future leadership abilities. There is a common misconception that leaders are born, not made. You may have been telling yourself that you don't have the personality for leadership. Or perhaps a negative early experience with an employee or a peer confrontation led you to feel discouraged about your ability to lead. Don't give up! Research shows—and leadership experts agree—that leadership is a set of competencies that can be learned through education, practice, experience, and coaching rather than innate talent.[2,3] In addition, leadership skills are transferable to other professions and can be utilized far beyond the work environment.

Why Leadership Skills and Competencies Are Essential

Leadership skills and competencies are necessary to be successful in life as well as work. The terms *skills* and *competencies* are often used interchangeably, but they are not the same. Skills are specific, learned activities that range widely in terms of complexity. Competencies are broader and define the knowledge, judgment, and required attitude in addition to skills.[4,5] Developing both skills and competencies enhances self-confidence and the ability to communicate and work effectively with others—critical in all aspects of life. Leadership training should start early in your career and combine knowledge and competency development through supervised

practice. Although research indicates that experience, rather than formal training, may be the best way to develop leaders, educational training that replicates developmentally challenging experiences (such as simulations and case studies) can complement experience and enhance leadership competency.[3,6] This is accomplished by motivating people to think critically about situations, teaching them to analyze underlying causes and consequences of problems, and enabling them to develop new ways of working with others.[4] Some individuals may have particular character traits that make it easier to develop these skills, but the majority of competency development is the result of learning and actual experience.

Many opportunities to obtain leadership training exist. Options range from free online leadership courses and short seminars or webinars to certificate programs and advanced degrees. If your employer offers or subsidizes any of these types of opportunities, take advantage of them. Expanding your leadership skills will give you the confidence and visibility to take on expanded roles; seize opportunities; and gain insights into yourself, your supervisors, and your colleagues.

Leadership challenges and opportunities are not confined to the work environment. Many everyday activities (eg, serving on the board of a parent-teacher or homeowners association or volunteering as a committee member for a service, professional, or religious organization) present opportunities to lead. For example, serving on your homeowners association board can provide the opportunity to expand your negotiating and communication skills, both of which are essential for leadership in any setting.

Leadership Theory Overview

Theories on what makes a good leader have evolved over hundreds of years. These theories are often characterized by which aspect of leadership is thought to be most critical in defining the leader. One of the early widespread leadership theories, the great man theory, was based on the belief that only a "great" man could have the characteristics of a great leader. Many philosophers also thought that leadership traits were something an individual was born with, were intrinsic, and would emerge when confronted with the appropriate situation.[5,7] This trait-based thinking continued into the mid-1900s, when behavior-based theories began to emerge. Behavior-based theories reflected a new perspective that focused on the behaviors of the leaders instead of their mental, physical, or social characteristics. This resulted in a shift in belief that leadership was not innate but could be developed. The most salient leadership theories today build on this understanding and also begin to integrate followers' perspectives and the situations in which leaders and followers interact.[5,7]

As continued research in psychology and business practice provides new evidence on effective leadership strategies, many new theories have emerged. Examples from the last 50 years include the following[7,8]:

- Transactional leader theory, or the exchange leadership theory, describes a hierarchical form of leadership characterized by transactions made between the leader and the followers using a structure of rewards and consequences.

- Transformational leadership theory describes a system in which leaders encourage, inspire, and motivate employees to innovate and create change that will help grow the organization and shape its future success.
- Participative leadership theory suggests that the ideal leadership style considers multiple parties' input. Team members' involvement increases engagement and collaboration and results in improved decision making and business outcomes.

Additional resources on leadership theory are provided at the end of this chapter.

Management vs Leadership

Like *skills* and *competencies*, the terms *management* and *leadership* are often used interchangeably but are two separate and distinct entities. Management and leadership are necessary and complementary sets of competencies that add value in the workplace, and in many roles, you need both. Managers often possess a title (such as human resources manager or regional manager) or other designated position, whereas leaders can be found at all levels of an organization and in nonwork environments. Box 1.1 lists additional distinctions.[3,9,10]

BOX 1.1 Differences Between Leadership and Management[3,9,10]

Leadership	Management
Title, designation, seniority not required	Role formalized with title and delegated power within an organizational structure
Can be in any environment: work, school, community, etc	Workplace related
Supervisory authority can be formal or informal	Supervisory authority is formal
Emphasis on inspiring people	Emphasis on managing activities
Key functions: » selecting talent » motivating » coaching » building trust » inspiring » leading change	Key roles: » planning » budgeting » controlling » evaluating » communicating

Fundamental Leadership Competencies

Several core competencies can substantially impact the effectiveness of a new leader, regardless of the role. These include communication, self-awareness, empathy, influence, and learning agility.[3,10-13] These core competencies can enhance your effectiveness immediately and represent the building blocks for development of more advanced leadership skills and competencies. For example, the core competency of influence can lead to the ability to steer long-range objectives as well as set the stage for inspiring other individuals.[6-8,14]

Communication

Communication is an essential skill and a component in many other leadership competencies, such as negotiation or influence. According to the Center for Creative Leadership, "Communicating information and ideas is consistently rated among the most important skills for leaders to be successful."[11] Whether you manage employees in a child nutrition program, serve on a board, coordinate a team of volunteers, or organize your neighborhood carpool, your leadership skills are dependent on your ability to communicate effectively with others. The competency of effective communication can be broken down into three core components: active listening, speaking with clarity, and writing clearly.[3,10]

Active Listening

> *"Seek first to understand, then to be understood."* —Stephen R. Covey

Many experts think listening is the most important component of excellent communication skills and the most poorly executed.[3,10-13] The Sperry Corporation found that of our four basic workplace skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), listening is the most used but the least taught.[15] Studies show that the average listener retains only half of what is presented in a 10-minute presentation, and after 48 hours, retention drops by half again.[9] Managers, because they are in a position of power and usually short on time, are particularly vulnerable to poor listening behaviors. They tend to dominate the conversation, interrupt others to make their own points, ignore contributions of team members, and so on.[13]

Active listening involves fully concentrating on what is being said and listening for meaning. It represents a blend of skills that can be learned and begins with identifying your own personal barriers to listening. Signs that you might be a poor listener include getting impatient, jumping in with solutions, interrupting, planning your responses while the other person is still talking, not giving verbal cues that you are paying attention, and missing the meaning behind the conversation. The goal of listening should be to understand, not to formulate an answer.

Leadership experts recommend the following tactics to improve your listening skills[3,10,16]:

- Communicate your attention nonverbally by facing the speaker, nodding, smiling, and maintaining eye contact.
- Avoid distractions (for example, put your phone or watch on silent, turn it over, etc).
- Make listening your single focus. Don't multitask.
- Suspend judgment. Look for the worth of the content.
- Wait until the speaker is finished before formulating your response.
- After the speaker finishes speaking, pause for 3 to 5 seconds to formulate your response. By doing this, you avoid the risk of interrupting the speaker, who may just be taking a breath, and you show the speaker you are considering what they've said.
- Ask questions for clarification.

- Briefly summarize the message or information you have just heard. This can be a difficult practice to develop, but it is the most effective way to demonstrate that you have truly heard and understood the individual.

Even though active listening seems like a very basic skill, it has a substantial impact on leader effectiveness. Active listening allows you to gain insight into your managers and colleagues and helps you build trust, improve employee engagement, and avoid misunderstandings. An example of active listening in the workplace is described in the following Stories From the Field box.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD: Active Listening in the Workplace

A university nutrition department chairperson was preparing to meet with an upset faculty member regarding an issue of workload equity. Before the meeting, the chairperson reviewed faculty workload assignments, forwarded their office phone calls, and put their cell phone on silent to ensure they would not be interrupted.

When the faculty member arrived, they immediately began sharing how frustrated they were that they taught more classes than their colleague and did much more work, even though they had less administrative time allocated. Even though the department chair had already researched the situation and thought the workloads were equitable, they let the faculty member air their grievance and then asked clarifying questions such as, "Can you tell me more about your current research obligations and any future research and grants that you have planned? You had three new course preps this year; how much time did you commit to that task? How do you handle a situation when a student comes to you rather than the other faculty member with issues related to the other faculty member or their class? What are your current service obligations at the university and with your profession?" The chairperson also made eye contact and nodded to indicate they were listening attentively and seeking to understand the source or sources of the faculty member's frustration. For example, was this truly a workload issue, or was it an issue of salary, lack of recognition, dissatisfaction with courses they were teaching, or something else?

Once the faculty member had finished sharing their issue, the chair summarized the issue to ensure they had heard the faculty member accurately. Then and only then, the chair shared their reasoning for the allocation of teaching and administrative responsibilities as well as factors that went into that allocation that the faculty member had not considered—for example, time that the other faculty member was spending administering a current grant and the additional grants and publications that the faculty member was preparing. In addition, the other faculty member was teaching several lab courses, so while the number of credits was lower, the time spent in the classroom actually exceeded the first faculty member's course load. By actively listening to the faculty member, the chairperson identified that a source of the faculty member's dissatisfaction was the number of new course preps they had done in the past year with little support in the classes from a teaching assistant. The faculty member was discouraged that much of the time dedicated to research was spent resubmitting publications, making the faculty member feel like no progress was being made on research. It also seemed unfair to the first faculty member that the other faculty member got administrative reassigned time when they did not seem to enjoy working with and spending time with students.

By increasing teaching assistant support, the chairperson was able to ensure the faculty member felt valued and heard and was satisfied with the chairperson's response.

Speaking With Clarity

"To be clear, stop and think, and then proceed slowly." —Brian Tracy[16]

Speaking with clarity is not just for public speaking. It is an essential skill if you will be directing the work of others, delegating, or leading in any way. When speaking with clarity, it is important to consider your audience. Unless you are speaking to a group

of like-minded colleagues, keep your communications basic and clear. For example, nurses on a unit typically only have time for a 10-minute in-service meeting. If you speak much longer than that, you may be affecting breaks or contributing to staff members going into overtime. Worse yet, you might get cut off before you get to the most important information. In addition to being concise, avoid jargon or acronyms. Your audience may miss the key message if they are busy trying to decipher an unfamiliar word or acronym. Clarity is also essential when assigning or delegating a task or doing performance coaching. Keeping your communication simple and clear and asking for a recap from your audience can help ensure your message was received as intended. See Box 1.2 for an example of speaking with clarity.

BOX 1.2 Clarity in the Workplace

Original: Pat, I know you have a lot on your plate, but it would be helpful if I could get a quick summary of our metrics in the next week or so. Nothing major, just the highlights. Thanks so much!

Better: Pat, I need a presentation of five or six slides with graphs showing our quality and customer service metrics for the quarter ending June 30th by this Friday at 5:00 PM to present to senior leadership next week. Do you see any barriers to getting this report done by that deadline? Thanks so much!

Structured Communication Tools

The Situation, Background, Assessment, Recommendation (SBAR) technique and communication huddles are two structured communication tools adopted by many health care institutions that may be adapted to your environment to help improve communication with your team. Originally developed by the US military for use in the context of nuclear submarines, SBAR has been adopted in many health care settings to ensure prompt and appropriate communication. This tool can help your staff learn the key components needed to send a complete message. See Box 1.3 for an example of SBAR communication.[17,18]

BOX 1.3 Situation, Background, Assessment, Recommendation Technique Communication in the Workplace[17,18]

S = Situation (Describe what happened; be specific.)	**S:** At 8:30 AM, a customer fell in the Westside Cafe while carrying a tray to a table. The cashier helped the customer up and checked to see if they were okay. The customer reported they were fine and refused medical attention. The cashier called the supervisor, who got the customer another breakfast and filled out an incident report.
B = Background (Explain the circumstances leading to the situation.)	**B:** The Westside Cafe is typically crowded at that hour, so it is often difficult to navigate the seating area.
A = Assessment (Explain what you think the problem is, and what concerns you.)	**A:** The congestion may have contributed to the customer falling. I am concerned because this is the second time this quarter we have had a fall in the cafe.
R = Recommendation (Make a recommendation to correct the problem.)	**R:** I recommend we rearrange the tables to create a wider path through the seating areas, and remind the cashiers to offer assistance to unsteady or frail customers.

A second effective communication tool is communication huddles. Huddles are frequent, quick briefings to help the team stay informed. These quick check-ins focus on important issues the staff are dealing with on a daily basis, such as equipment failure, patient workload, staff coverage for a required training, and so on.[19,20] To make huddles successful, keep the focus on shift activities and problem solving, and actively and consistently include team members. Also, keep the meetings short—1 to 10 minutes is ideal.[15,16] The Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) has good resources to assist with huddle implementation.[20] Nutrition-focused examples of the effective use of huddles are provided in Box 1.4.

BOX 1.4 Communication Huddles in Dietetics

Patient Meal Service: Nutrition and dietetics technicians, registered (NDTRs) huddle every morning to discuss patient food issues from the previous day, then attend the patient services huddle in the kitchen to share the identified issues with the kitchen team so they can quickly intervene.

Clinical Nutrition: Registered dietitian nutritionists (RDNs) (who do not attend multidisciplinary rounds on weekends) huddle to determine which patients do not get early enteral nutrition over the weekend. They then convene with all RDNs who work the weekend to set up a mechanism in the electronic health record to identify and prioritize intensive care unit patients ventilated in the last 24 to 48 hours to assess and start enteral nutrition, if appropriate.

Writing Clearly

An important skill of leaders at all levels is the ability to write clear, simple, direct messages. Be sure to use a professional, neutral tone in all written communication in the workplace. Written communication has advantages in many situations. It is especially valuable when giving instructions because the receiver can refer back to the instructions later. The two most common forms of written communication in the workplace are email and text communication, with texting rapidly overtaking email. According to Text Request, a company that works with organizations on managing text communication strategy, texting is the most common form of communication for US adults aged 50 years or less, with the average person sending 15 texts per day.[21] Business communication leaders recommend avoiding abbreviations that wouldn't be understood across all generations (such as ICYMI for "in case you missed it"), and avoiding emojis or using them sparingly, since both make texts informal. The focus of workplace text messages, especially to clients and managers, should remain centered on work at all times, unless the other party initiates a personal conversation about appropriate topics.[22]

The unprecedented increase in smartphone use and wearable devices, such as watches and trackers has made instant, discrete, and constant communication possible. Instant and spontaneous communication has benefits, but it also has detrimental, unintended consequences due to grammatical errors, autocorrect errors, and judgment errors due to lack of thought.[21,23] If you must respond immediately, pick up the phone or acknowledge receipt of the message via text or email to let the sender know you will get back to them within a stated time frame with more thorough information.

Despite the rise in texting, email is still used constantly in the workplace. It can be very useful for general, nonsensitive information when you don't need feedback or when you need to provide written instructions. Choose your communication method based on the type of information you are sending. Generally, the more impersonal the communication is, the less likely it is to be clear to everyone due to the inability to assess nonverbal cues, determine tone of voice, or ask clarifying questions. General tips for effective emails include the following:

- Don't overcommunicate by email, either in terms of frequency or content. Make good use of subject lines by keeping them brief and using key words, such as Action Required by (date), Vacation Request, and Update to draw attention to the email.[24,25] Keep messages clear and brief. Send information in discrete chunks by topic, using multiple emails if necessary. Make use of bullet points and numbered lists whenever possible.
- Be polite. Always be professional and respectful.
- Watch your tone. Choice of words, punctuation, capitalization, and sentence length can easily be misinterpreted without visual and verbal cues.
- Proofread. Typos and poor grammar reflect a lack of attention to detail.
- Use Reply All with care! Think carefully about who truly needs a response. Typically, that is someone who has been copied on the original email. You should avoid replying to all recipients if your response is not relevant to everyone, especially if your response relates to confidential or sensitive information.
- Indicate whether or not you expect a reply or other action to be taken as a result of the email.

Follow confidentiality guidelines with vigilance. Ensure that you and your team know which communication methods are approved and how to utilize encryption. Email encryption is the process of converting email messages and attachments into an unrecognizable form to protect the contents from being read by anyone other than the intended recipients. Encrypted email messages typically require authentication before they can be read. As you build relationships with your team, ask members how they prefer to communicate. For example, ask, "What's the best way for us to stay in touch on this project?"[26] Sensitive information, such as delivering bad news or addressing a performance issue, should never be communicated via email or text.[17,18] Communication of protected health information (PHI) via text may be allowed, but there are usually stringent requirements regarding its use. Finally, an unwritten but important rule is as follows: if email or text communication becomes volatile or contentious, the best recourse is to pick up the phone or arrange to discuss the matter face-to-face where there will be less chance of misinterpretation of intent or tone.

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is the ability to monitor one's own emotions and reactions. Lack of self-awareness can easily derail a new leader. This can be one of the most challenging of the core skills to develop, but once developed, it can serve as the foundation for developing your other leadership skills.[3,11,27] According to Scisco et al, "We are the worst judges of our own strengths and weaknesses, so it's vitally important to have women and men whom we trust offer insights on what we're

doing well and what we can do better."[27] The following actions are effective ways to increase your self-awareness[3,10,11,27]:

- Practice daily self-reflection through journaling, meditating, and thoughtfully considering feedback received. Block out time on your calendar to do this, so it will not be pushed aside as day-to-day business takes over.
- Know your emotional triggers, catch yourself reacting when your emotions are triggered, and consider what appropriate reactions should be.
- When listening, be sure to consider your attitudes, past history, and so on, and think about how they might affect your engagement. For example, if a particular nurse has complained to you about issues you felt were unimportant in the past, do not let that hinder your ability to pay attention in the future. Instead, consider that there may be a valid issue that needs addressing. In addition, do not let your body language reflect your emotions.
- Work with your supervisor, mentor, or a trusted colleague to obtain feedback. Listen and be open to receiving the feedback. See Box 1.5 for examples of creative ways to obtain feedback.[3,10,11,27]

BOX 1.5 Creative Ways to Obtain Feedback[3,10,11,27]

- **Ask, "What is one thing I did well and one thing I could improve on?"** This can be used equally effectively with your supervisor, colleagues, and students and with employees with whom you have a built a relationship of trust. If this is effective, you can expand it to ask for additional examples.
- **Be specific.** For example, rather than ask a general question ("Do you have any feedback for me?") try this: "When I reviewed the policy at the meeting, did I speak loudly enough and was my summary clear?"
- **If you plan to request feedback from a colleague or supervisor for your performance in a particular situation, notify them in advance so they can be watching for a particular behavior.** "When I present the protocol to the physicians, can you let me know if I use the word 'like' too often and if I answered their questions effectively?"
- **Use a mix of structured and open-ended questions in surveys and evaluation tools.** An example of an open-ended question is, "What is one thing you would change about your job?" An example of a structured question is, "On a scale of 1 to 5, how valued do you feel at work?"
- **When requesting feedback from others—especially subordinates—use methods that ensure anonymity** (such as SurveyMonkey and other online survey platforms).
- **Coach yourself: Pay attention to how others respond to your actions.** Assess how you respond in times of stress. Are you receptive? Do you lash out? Taking a good hard look at ourselves, particularly as we move into new roles that require new behaviors, can help us address issues early on when they are smaller and easier to fix.

Empathy

Empathy, as defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is "the ability to understand and share the feelings of another."[28] An empathetic leader is able to utilize the awareness of another person's feelings to understand how those emotions influence the person's needs and perceptions.

Empathy is a core leadership skill because it enables you to build trust. You can't be an effective leader if your team doesn't trust you. Developing empathy can also make you more successful in understanding the motivations of others and gives you the ability to relate to different perspectives.

A survey conducted by the Center for Creative Leadership of more than 6,000 leaders in 38 countries found that empathy was positively related to job performance and that leaders who displayed more empathy toward their employees were viewed as better performers in their jobs by their bosses.[20] Empathy may seem like a character trait you either have or you don't, but empathy, like the other core leadership skills, can be developed with practice. The following tools and activities may help you strengthen your empathy skills, and thus help to build trust[10,11,27,29]:

- Practice active listening. If you have been working on this, you are on your way! The components of active listening—not interrupting, being fully present, asking clarifying questions, and displaying positive nonverbal behavior—all project empathy.
- Refer to people by name. Remember the names of people's spouses, children, and even pets, and refer to them by name. Recording this information may be helpful.
- Be cognizant of your own nonverbal communication. For example, smiling at others and making eye contact communicates your interest in what they are sharing.
- Tune into other people's nonverbal communication to identify whether your words, tone, or body language are having a negative impact or are unclear, and adjust accordingly.
- Encourage people when they speak up in meetings, particularly those who do not tend to do so. A nod or quick, affirming comment can help boost confidence.
- Take a personal interest in people. Ask them questions about their hobbies, their volunteer work, and their aspirations.
- Give praise that is genuine and specific.

Influence

Influence is the ability to impact the decisions, actions, opinions, or thinking of others. The core competency of influence enables you to get things done and achieve the outcomes you are working toward without coercion or individuals feeling they are being manipulated. If you do not have a formal leadership role, influence is about working effectively with coworkers over whom you have no managerial control. To effectively influence people, you need to be able to engage in give-and-take dialogues and present logical and compelling arguments to convince or persuade others to support an idea or a direction.[3,11,30]

The terms *influence* and *persuasion* are often used interchangeably, but they are two different strategies that may be utilized to achieve the same goal. Influence is about the messenger and involves feelings and values, and persuasion is more about the message. Persuading is more deliberate and obvious but also more short term. Influence is more art than science and, like the other key leadership skills, takes time and practice to master. The Stories From the Field box on the next page provides an example of developing influence.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD: Developing Influence in the Workplace

A registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN) volunteered to present the clinical nutrition department's volume-based tube feeding protocol to the Pharmacy and Therapeutics Committee for approval. The RDN knew that one of the physician committee members voiced skepticism of the potential effectiveness of the new protocol, so the RDN utilized the leadership competency of influence in the following ways:

- The RDN leveraged the literature to ensure that references were appropriately cited showing the positive impact of volume-based feeding and best practice examples from other hospitals of similar size, especially competitors.
- The RDN has a great relationship with the pharmacy director, so the RDN met with the director to share the initial idea and obtain support for it ahead of time.
- The RDN asked the pharmacy director about the skeptical physician and other key committee members' chief priorities for patient care (eg, decreased length of stay or patient safety), to tailor the presentation to show how volume-based feeding addresses those priorities.
- The RDN practiced answering potential questions from the committee members ahead of time with the clinical nutrition manager to help prepare for a successful presentation.
- The RDN identified one or two negotiable points, such as doing a shorter pilot program or restricting the protocol to a single unit initially if passage of the protocol did not appear likely.

Fortunately, there are multiple, practical strategies that can help you improve your influencing skills. If this is not a strength of yours, consider practicing this skill in low-risk situations or in one-on-one situations rather than trying to influence a larger group. Key strategies recommended by business leaders include the following[7,11,22]:

- Build rapport by remembering people's names, identifying common ground or shared experiences, listening actively, and asking questions to indicate genuine interest.
- Study and observe others to understand their personality style, what projects excite or frustrate them, how they prefer to work or solve problems, and so on.
- Establish trust by being respectful, transparent, and following through on commitments.
- Gather background information. Do your homework on topics you are trying to promote or influence. Have examples of actions and history to back up what you are saying.
- Know your desired outcome and what you are trying to achieve.
- Practice in front of a mirror until you like how you come across.
- Utilize active listening and pay attention to nonverbal and verbal cues. If you sense your approach is not working, try changing tone, asking questions, and so forth.
- Gain credibility by consistently working hard and getting good results.
- Take a training course specifically focused on building influence, such as those offered by Dale Carnegie, Learning Tree, and others.

Learning Agility

Learning agility is a set of skills that gives an individual the ability to learn something in one situation and apply that knowledge in a completely different situation.[11,31,32] Learning-agile individuals are highly skilled at learning from experience. They are often described by leadership experts as flexible, resourceful, adaptable, and thoughtful. Research conducted by Columbia University and the Center for Creative Leadership identified four behaviors that enable learning agility and one that derails it. The four enabling behaviors—innovating, performing, reflecting, and risking—were positively correlated with performance. *Innovating* is defined as being unafraid to challenge the status quo. *Performing* is used here to refer to the ability to remain calm in the face of stress or difficulty. *Reflecting* is taking the time to think back on one's experiences, and *risking* is intentionally putting oneself in challenging circumstances.[11,13]

Defending behavior was found to negatively impact learning agility or even derail it. Defensiveness has a negative impact on performance, particularly among leaders. The research team found that leaders who ranked high on the defending scale—those who remain closed or defensive when challenged or given critical feedback—tended to be lower in learning agility and were considered less effective.[31] Leaders at *Harvard Business Review* and *Forbes* suggest the following ways to develop learning agility[31,32]:

- **Innovating:** Seek out new solutions. Repeatedly ask yourself, "What else?" and "What are 10 more ways I could approach this?"
- **Performing:** Seek to identify patterns in complex situations. Find the similarities between current and past projects. Cultivate calm through meditation and other techniques. Enhance your listening skills, and learn to listen instead of simply (and immediately) reacting.
- **Reflecting:** Explore "what ifs" and alternative histories for projects you have been involved in. Regularly seek out honest input. Ask, "What are three or four things I or we could have done better here?"
- **Risking:** Look for "stretch assignments," where the success isn't a given. For example, implementing a farm-to-table program at your school's dining service or implementing the International Dysphagia Diet Standardization Initiative (IDDSI) at your extended care facility are challenging assignments that involve many stakeholders and require extensive coordination and oversight to implement effectively.
- **Avoid defending:** Acknowledge your failures (perhaps from those stretch assignments) and capture the lessons you've learned from them.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to understand and manage one's own emotions as well as recognize and influence other people's emotions.[3,10,33,34] Effective leadership competencies and emotional intelligence are closely related. In general, emotional intelligence consists of three skills: the ability to identify, name, and own your emotions; the ability to apply one's own emotions to tasks, such as problem

solving; and the ability to help others manage their emotions.[3,33,34] Although there is limited evidence in the literature that emotional intelligence is directly linked to job performance, there is evidence that the characteristics of emotional intelligence such as empathy and influence have an impact.[7] Furthermore, since leadership is widely considered to be the ability to guide and influence others, the ability to successfully interact with others supports the need for emotional intelligence in leaders. Developing the five core leadership skills listed earlier in this chapter (communication, self-awareness, empathy, influence, and learning agility) will greatly assist you in improving your emotional intelligence, since these concepts are so closely aligned.

Common Mistakes New Leaders Make

New leaders may find themselves unprepared for their new roles. According to Daskal, "Everything you've done so far in your career has led you to this position. But the experiences and skills that landed you this new job will not be what allows you to succeed."[35] Research conducted by the Center for Creative Leadership shows that up to 40% of newly promoted managers and executives are no longer in their roles within 18 months of a promotion.[11] Business and leadership experts surmise that the most common and damaging mistakes made by new leaders typically involve communicating with people in the wrong way.[3,13,14,16] The following list details some of the most common mistakes new leaders make. These can be avoided or minimized with a focus on the core leadership competencies discussed earlier in this chapter.

Failing to develop trust with a new team Build trust through communication and empathy. New leaders need to listen to learn the environment and the people. Truly listening enables you to understand the content and the context of what your team member is saying. This can help you respond appropriately, avoid overreacting, and make better decisions. Getting to know your team members builds trust and enables you to gain an understanding of what motivates them. For example, it is a common mistake to assume lack of motivation is always tied to compensation; other factors that impact motivation include poor fit for the position, a perceived lack of fairness regarding workload or schedule, and frustration with underperforming coworkers. Another way to build trust is to obtain employee input before making any changes that impact them. It is also essential to explain clearly why you were unable to implement changes based on their feedback, if that is the situation. Being authentic, honest, sincere, and visible is key to building trust. Being visible can convey to your team that you are truly interested in resolving issues, care about their work load, and are willing to help when necessary.

Avoiding performance issues Leaders may avoid addressing team members' behavioral or performance problems due to fear of confrontation and lack of confidence in their ability to address the issues effectively. This can result in a lack of motivation in the employee and escalation of the issue, and it can also negatively impact other team members who believe there is no penalty for below-average results and there are no rewards for top performers.[14,35,36] Performance issues may result from a leader's failure to effectively communicate their expectations. As we will see later in this chapter, timely performance coaching can enable the leader to clarify expectations and resolve issues quickly and effectively.

Making hiring mistakes New leaders tend to feel very pressured to fill open positions quickly. Bowing to that pressure rather than taking the time to hire a truly qualified candidate does little to build the new leader's credibility with their team. Utilize your team's feedback on what skills or qualifications matter most in the new hire.

Failing to define goals and set expectations It is essential for new leaders to set clear goals aligned with the organization's objectives and communicate expectations with their team members. When setting expectations, be direct, clear, and specific. Ask for a recap if nonverbal behavior suggests any team member is disengaged or confused; it is not the employee or team member's job to decipher what you say.[37]

Not delegating or not asking for help Often new managers are afraid to delegate for reasons such as a fear of loss of control or a need to prove their value to their team. However, effective delegation, along with clear communication of responsibilities, timelines, and expectations, can enable a manager to be more productive and impactful. In addition, it empowers team members, aids in building trust, and gives staff opportunities to develop as individual leaders.

Not providing feedback Key tips to providing effective feedback include the following:

- Praise people or teams in public, but share negative feedback in private. This is essential in developing and maintaining the trust of your team.
- Focus on the action, not the individual. It is more helpful to say, "Your outpatient revenue is down 30% this month. What do you think has influenced that drop, and what can we do to improve it?" than to say, "Your performance has been lagging this month."
- Listen more than you talk. For example, if a previously high-performing employee starts arriving to work late, utilize the active listening skills discussed earlier in this chapter to understand what is impacting the employee's ability to get to work. Fully understanding the situation could allow you to better explore ways to address the underlying cause *with* the employee—for example, by helping the employee brainstorm transportation options or arranging a temporary shift change, rather than simply reiterating the attendance policy.
- Provide positive feedback more often than negative. The latest research on the praise ratio finds that employees perform their best when they receive at least five (and ideally six) pieces of positive feedback for every piece of negative feedback.[11,38] This approach should be utilized for everyone except any documented poor performers you anticipate terminating. Don't delay. Provide feedback as soon as possible after the incident occurs.
- Ask what you can do to help. This is especially important when addressing an issue that can be improved with training, such as correctly completing a job task or refining skills in time management or customer service.

Many of the mistakes typical of new leaders stem from ineffective communication. By being aware of these potential issues and focusing on developing their core leadership competencies, new leaders will be better prepared to succeed in their new roles. The following Stories From the Field presents a case study involving a new dietetics leader.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD: A New Leader

A registered dietitian nutritionist was recently promoted to a program manager position at their health and wellness center. One of the manager's new responsibilities was to supervise the part-time community liaison responsible for assisting with community relationships and facilitating the teen program. The new manager worked hard to develop a friendly relationship with the employee due to their role in the community. They frequently texted back and forth regarding the teen program and operations issues.

When the manager took over supervision of the employee, they were notified that the employee had a history of inconsistently completing their time sheets. After several months, the manager began to experience this issue and had to follow up with the employee multiple times to obtain and record their hours. Not wanting to sacrifice their relationship with the employee, the manager opted to remind the employee of policy and hope they would correct the situation. After a brief period of improvement, the problem resurfaced. Tired of having to constantly reach out for this information, the manager opted to begin estimating the hours worked and filling out the time sheets for the employee.

A month later, the employee worked substantially more hours than usual to assist with teen vacation camps. The busy manager overlooked this when estimating the employee's hours and the employee was substantially underpaid. The employee, upset and frustrated, used a curse word in the text they sent the manager regarding the inaccuracy of their paycheck. The manager became very upset and wanted to terminate the employee.

The manager, the employee, and the department director sat down to address the situation. When asked about the text language, the employee told the manager, "I thought we were friends. I texted you like I would my friend. I was really upset, I have bills to pay. I need my money!" The manager remained focused on the language issue and the situation became tense.

At this point, the director intervened, informing the employee that they were required to submit a time sheet every Friday by 5:00 PM or they would not be paid that week. The director also told the employee to make a copy of the time sheet so that they would always know exactly how many hours they would be paid for. The director informed the manager that managers were prohibited from entering hours for employees without a time sheet generated by the employee. The unprofessional language issue was also addressed, and the texting policy was reviewed.

Practical Ways to Develop Leadership Skills

There are many opportunities to develop leadership skills in everyday life as well as in one's career. Everyday activities with family, friends, people in your networks, or a work team all present opportunities to lead. Some ways to develop leadership skills in the workplace include these strategies.

Work with a mentor, or mentor others Mentorship is highly effective in helping develop leadership skills but is often underutilized. In a survey of 684 clinical RDNs, Patten and Sauer[39] found that working with a mentor or serving as a mentor to new RDNs or students was one of the 27 leadership behaviors practiced least frequently. The benefits of having a mentor include expanding your network of contacts, increased access to consistent feedback, opportunities to practice your core leadership skills in a safe environment, and improved self-confidence. There are several things to consider in order to find a mentor that will be beneficial to you. Most business experts recommend first deciding the specific role you'd like the mentor to provide.[40] For example, are you looking for someone within your organization to help you advance? Are you looking to transition to a new area of dietetics, such as moving from foodservice management into higher education? Other key steps include making a list of potential individuals who might mentor you and developing

a concise and effective "elevator speech" to share with these potential mentors when you approach them. The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics offers electronic mentoring resources through its professional website (www.eatrightPRO.org), and several dietetic practice groups and member interest groups offer their own mentoring and guidance resources. Mentoring is covered in greater detail in Chapters 2 and 7.

Seek out challenging projects or committee assignments Serving as a representative from your department to the Joint Commission Readiness Committee, volunteering to colead the resident advisory committee at your extended care facility, and leading a peer interview are all ways to develop leadership skills. Additional examples include agreeing to be interviewed by the media on an important and timely nutrition topic or volunteering to take the lead in revising an outdated policy and procedure and presenting it to the group for feedback; these are all ways to develop leadership capacity.

Get involved in a cause you care about Raise your hand when an opportunity to take a leadership role comes up, no matter how small. Doing well in a small role could open opportunities for larger responsibilities. Professional organizations, such as your local dietetics group and dietetic practice groups, as well as community organizations are great places to start. These groups always need volunteers, and you can start your leadership experience in ways that make you feel comfortable.

Cultivate a diverse network Get to know people at your facility in different roles, departments, or professions. This can lead to a broader perspective about your institution, expand your thinking, and teach you more about yourself. Go to lunch with the coder who worked with you on your malnutrition coding project or the pharmacist on your floor. Have coffee with the cafeteria manager.

Networks are just as beneficial outside the workplace as they are inside it. Get involved in community organizations, places of worship, or other groups where you'll encounter people of different ages, experiences, cultures, races, perspectives, and backgrounds. Box 1.6 lists examples of leadership roles and potential leadership competencies that could be developed or enhanced.

BOX 1.6 Leadership Roles and Competencies

Leadership role	Potential competencies
Secretary, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics dietetic practice group	Communication, influence
Membership coordinator, parent–teacher association	Communication, empathy, influence
Coordinator of a holiday toy drive at your place of worship	Communication, influence, negotiation,[a] empathy, learning agility
Program reviewer—Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND)	Communication, empathy, learning agility
Joint Commission representative for your hospital department	Communication, influence, learning agility
Department safety officer	Communication, influence, learning agility, negotiation[a]

[a] See Chapter 2 for more information on negotiation.

Managing Others: Opportunities and Challenges

Whether in a formal or informal role, the thought of managing others takes many of us out of our comfort zone. In this section, we will discuss specific areas of concern.

Working Effectively With Your Supervisor

One of your most important relationships at work is the one you have with your supervisor or team leaders. Establishing an effective relationship built on trust is essential for your success in your current role, as well as for future growth and development. One reason this relationship can be challenging is that your supervisor plays two roles—supporter and evaluator.[41] Business leaders recommend to optimize your relationship with your supervisor [3,11,13,38,39]:

- Take stock of your relationship. Is it a partnership? Regardless of whether you like or admire your supervisor, it is your responsibility to ensure the relationship is a partnership that benefits both of you.
- Observe your supervisor in the workplace and ask questions to gain an understanding of their work style. For example, do they prefer written communication or verbal communication? Do they like detailed reports or brief reports condensed to bullet points? How often do they prefer to meet, and in what setting? What are their priorities for the team or the department?
- Don't be afraid to ask your supervisor for help.
- Minimize surprises. No one likes to deliver negative news, but your supervisor would rather hear it from you than be caught unaware at a meeting with their peers or supervisor.
- Don't go to your supervisor with a list of complaints; come with potential solutions to problems.
- Resist the urge to criticize your supervisor to others. It will get back to them and reflect poorly on you. This behavior also makes other people reluctant to hire or promote you, suspecting you will one day speak about them in the same way.
- Take responsibility for your own development. Speak with your supervisor to ensure there is alignment between your goals and theirs.

Coaching for Performance

Coaching for performance is a process of managing people that creates a motivational climate that helps enhance employee growth, development, and work performance through frequent feedback, recognition, and support. The goal of coaching for performance is to work with the employee to solve performance issues and improve the work of the employee, the department, and the institution or company. Coaching for performance tends to be the skill that fills new leaders with the most anxiety. There are multiple models available and the core elements of these models will be summarized here. The first step is to review your institution's policies and procedures on performance coaching to ensure you utilize the correct process. Regardless of the model you utilize, unless a serious offense has occurred that potentially requires termination, your first performance conversation with an employee should be coaching.

Ask yourself the following questions before scheduling a coaching session:

- Have you developed a relationship of trust with the employee?
- Do you know the employee well enough to evaluate whether they are in the correct position within your organization? Some potential signs of a poor fit include staff members who never get excited about their jobs, can't master job tasks despite repeated instruction, appear bored or chronically complain, and never share ideas.[7,39,40]
- Are you well prepared? Be sure you understand the coaching or progressive discipline process at your facility. Familiarize yourself with what constitutes a verbal warning, what constitutes a written warning, what forms need to be completed or signed, and so on. Until you are competent in this skill, have your supervisor, a more experienced manager, or a member of the human resources team sit in with you to observe and provide feedback afterward. They can also step in if the situation gets volatile or you make a serious error, but you should lead the conversation. After the coaching session, ask for feedback from your observer or coach. Use your self-reflection skills to note how you did and what you could have done better. This self-reflection includes asking yourself whether you listened actively, spoke clearly, checked your body language, and kept your composure, as well as whether you asked questions to confirm the employee's understanding of the situation and the repercussions of failing to improve.

Like most skills, gaining mastery in employee coaching takes practice. Don't beat yourself up if you stumble a little at first.

Method 1: Effective Coaching Blueprint

There are multiple coaching methods available in the business and human resources literature. These methods range from four to seven steps, but they all contain the following essential elements. The order of these six elements will vary slightly, depending on how the conversation flows.[40-43]

1. **Describe the performance problem to the employee.** Stick to facts, and focus on the problem or behavior. Provide accurate and specific examples to illustrate the concern. Ask questions to ensure you both are on the same page. Explain to the employee the impact their behavior has on the team and department.
2. **Ask for the employee's view of the situation.** Use your active listening skills to ensure you understand their side of the story.
3. **Determine if there are any barriers to the employee being able to perform the task effectively or fix the behavior (such as a lack of time, training, or tools, or the employee's temperament).** Do you as the leader need to assist in some way, or can the employee fix the behavior themselves?
4. **Obtain agreement from the employee that a problem exists, then discuss potential solutions.**
5. **Agree on a written action plan and discuss what the employee will do and what you will do to resolve the issue.** Complete and obtain signatures on any form your facility requires.
6. **Set a date and time for a follow-up discussion.**

Method 2: GROW Model

The second method of coaching for performance is known as the GROW model, a popular coaching method developed by Sir John Whitmore in the 1980s. It is used for all types of coaching. GROW is an acronym for the four key steps used in the model[44]:

- **Goal:** Identify a behavior that the coach and the participant agree should change, then structure a goal related to that behavior.
- **Reality:** The coaching participant describes their current reality related to this behavior.
- **Options:** Explore and decide on best options to achieve the goal.
- **Will or Way Forward:** The participant commits to specific actions that will move them forward in achieving the goal.

According to business leaders, the keys to successfully utilizing the GROW model are to ask excellent questions and to ask the right question at the right time.[44] The GROW model is further discussed in Chapter 2.

Method 3: High, Middle, and Low Conversations

The third method, developed by Quint Studer, is a process for categorizing employees into high, middle, and low performers and having targeted coaching conversations with all your direct reports, starting with those identified as high performers.[36]

High performers High performers are intrinsically motivated by performance and become frustrated when others don't work at their level. They are also most alluring to your competition. Your goal is to re-recruit them. This is especially important with Generation X and Millennial employees who may always be looking out for the next opportunity. They need to know you value them and are actively partnering with them to achieve their developmental goals.[36-38]

Middle performers Middle performers are generally reliable employees who are held back by behaviors or a lack of training. These challenges keep them from realizing their potential and becoming high performers. The goal here is to move middle performers to a higher level. Studer recommends a three-step process: First, reassure middle performers that your goal is to retain them, and then describe their good attributes. Second, provide coaching on specific developmental opportunities. Third, reassure middle performers of your commitment to their success.

Low performers The final conversations should occur with low performers. These individuals may have safety violations, customer complaints, or other job-related issues. The goal here is to move them up or out of the organization. Studer recommends taking four action steps for low performers: First, describe the problem behavior, avoiding pleasantries or small talk. Second, describe how you feel (frustrated, disappointed, etc). Third, show, demonstrate, or describe in detail how a task should be completed. Fourth, clearly state the consequences of lack of improvement, and ask questions to affirm understanding.[36]

Developing a Leadership Mindset

Concurrent with the competencies described earlier in this chapter, it is also important to develop a leadership mindset. A mindset is a mental attitude or inclination, a filter through which we see the world. Your impact as a leader stems directly from your mindset. This is because your mindset affects your behaviors, which then affect your results. A leadership mindset is a way of thinking and behaving that makes us willing to stand up and stand out, welcoming growth and seeing leadership opportunities where others may not. According to leaders in organizational change, the first step in developing a leadership mindset is having the belief that new abilities can be developed with effort.[3,45,46] Developing or advancing your core competencies of communication, self-awareness, empathy, learning agility, and influence and practicing these essential skills is important regardless of your current role or career stage. Other examples of a leadership mindset include being outward facing rather than inward facing, seeing the big picture, and thinking in terms of systems.

It's easy to have a leadership mindset when things are going well—when you're fully staffed, customer satisfaction and quality scores are high, and finances are stable, for example—but you need this mindset most during times of stress and uncertainty. While shifting your mindset and priorities can be difficult, you can substantially improve the outcomes and impact delivered by your team, and by you, both inside and outside the workplace by developing a leadership mindset.[3,45,46]

Setting the Stage for Advanced Leadership Skills

The competencies you develop with early leadership skills provide you with the tools to progress to more advanced leadership skills. Once you've mastered the basics, you will be able to learn advanced skills with additional training, experience, and practice. Early in your career, your communications skill development may be focused on writing and speaking clearly as well as using active listening skills. As you move up the career ladder or into more formal management roles, you will use the core communication skills you developed early on to achieve mastery of more advanced skills, such as building trust and conveying vision and strategic intent, which have communication at their roots.[9,11,13,16] For example, developing skills such as facilitation, change management, negotiation, and conveying vision and strategic intent may seem daunting, but they all stem from communication, empathy, and influence.

Numerous tools and methods are available to assess your leadership competencies and develop your plan for the future. The first step is to assess where you are. Tools such as the Standards of Professional Performance (SOPP) for RDNs in management of food and nutrition systems, the self-assessment available from the American College of Healthcare Executives (ACHE), and the Competency Plan Builder from the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR) are all excellent resources.[46-48] If you are in a leadership position currently, you may have access to a 360-degree review that provides feedback from those who supervise you, your peers, and your subordinates.

Once you have completed your self-assessment, the next step is to meet with your supervisor or mentor to share the results and determine how to proceed. The next step could be to identify projects and experiences to help you develop your leadership competencies further. For example, in a clinical setting, developing a hospital protocol for outpatient nutrition screening could help you with your influence and negotiation skills. If you work in school foodservice, you could develop a farm-to-table initiative at your school, which could enhance your communication, influence, and negotiating skills.

There are many sources for leadership training. Check with your manager, your professional association, or the place you volunteer in the community to see what resources they have. The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics has numerous, excellent resources available including several online certificates, training programs, and learning modules. There is also a list of useful leadership books and websites available on the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics professional website. In addition, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Leadership Institute, a 12-month professional development program, offers extended leadership training and hands-on experience through a combination of self-directed study, in-person trainings, networking opportunities, small group projects, and virtual learning. More information on the Leadership Institute is available on the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics professional website (www.eatrightPRO.org).[49]

Summary

All dietetics professionals can be leaders. Effective leadership does not require innate skills, but it is a series of competencies that can be learned through education and practice. You don't need to be in a management role or supervise others to be a leader. By focusing on developing the core competencies of communication, self-awareness, influence, empathy, and learning agility, you will be well on your way to becoming an effective leader. These core competencies will provide the fundamentals from which you can expand your skill set through increased experience and expanded roles and responsibilities.

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