The Hard Truth About Soft Skills: Leadership and Promotion at the US Food and Drug Administration

Issam Zineh, PharmD, MPH | Office of Clinical Pharmacology
Office of Translational Sciences | CDER | US FDA

ASCPT 2016 Annual Meeting | March 12, 2016
Soft Skills

- Cluster of traits, personal habits, interpersonal agility, communication skills, attitude (e.g., friendliness and optimism) that characterize relationships with others*
- Important part of individual contribution to success of an organization
- Screening or training can yield significant ROI for an organization
- Increasingly sought out by employers in addition to standard qualifications (hiring, promotion)

**Hard Truth #1:** These are among the hardest skills to come by.

**Hard Truth #2:** Presence of soft skills not emphasized in the scientific/technical realm; notable absence is often justified away.

**Hard Truth #3:** Many organizations don’t effectively invest in this area of staff development.

Outline

- FDA’s Office of Clinical Pharmacology: Organizational Snapshot
- The Importance of Competency Models
- Individualized Professional Development
- Takeaways

Acknowledgments:
- Lauren Brum (FDA Office of Clinical Pharmacology)
- Joseph Grillo (FDA Office of Clinical Pharmacology)
- Kathy Hanson (FDA Division of Learning and Organizational Development)

Resources:
1. The intellectual and scientific exercise | 2. The knowledge matrix | 3. The operating culture
Critical Path of Informed Decision Making

Development
- Safety
- Efficacy
- Quality

Review
- Benefit
- Risk

Action
- Access

Use
- For Whom
- In Whom
- How

Access
- Never
- Ever
- Yes
Recent Leadership Developments

N=21 leadership positions in 1 year

Some Notable Observations

• Common perception: positional leadership = bona fide leadership

• Four phenotypes
  – Demonstrated leader
  – Emerging leader, self-aware
  – Emerging leader, newly awakened
  – Aspiring individual contributor

• Established senior leaders must know which category individual staffers fall into and professionally develop accordingly; failure to do so:
  – Underutilization
  – Inefficiency
  – Staff at-risk (morale, burnout, boredom, etc.)

• Eventuality is no substitute for opportunity
The Importance of Competency Models

An observable, measurable pattern of skills, knowledge, abilities, behaviors and other characteristics that an individual needs to perform work roles or occupational functions successfully (U.S. Office of Personnel Management)
Leadership Competency Model

Deliberate development through progressive learning opportunities that broaden experience and increase responsibility.

Senior Leaders (Lead Organizations)
- Entrepreneurship
- External Awareness
- Vision

Manager of Managers (Lead Programs)
- Creativity & Innovation
- Financial Management
- Partnering
- Political Savvy
- Strategic Thinking
- Technology Management
- Resilience

Manager (Lead People)
- Conflict Management
- Developing Others
- Human Capital Management
- Leveraging Diversity
- Team Building

Team Leads & Emerging Leaders (Lead Teams & Self)
- Accountability
- Decisiveness
- Influencing & Negotiating
- Technical Credibility
- Customer Service
- Flexibility
- Problem Solving
- Public Service Motivation
- Integrity/Honesty
- Communication
- Continual Learning

LEADING CHANGE
LEADING PEOPLE
BUILDING COALITIONS
RESULTS DRIVEN
BUSINESS ACUMEN
What do We do with This?

1. Develop a competency profile for various leadership positions
2. Distinguish between
   • Price-of-Admission
   • Competitive Edge
   • Differentiator Competencies
3. Use this profile for level setting, talent attraction/selection, and individualized professional development plans
4. Focus on experiential learning opportunities that progressively broaden staff members’ experiences and increase responsibility (vis-à-vis a wide “collection” of experiences/technical training)
5. Communicate widely
Steps 1 and 2: Develop Competency Profile (OCP TL)

STRATEGIC SKILLS
Technical Learning*; Learning on the Fly†; Problem Solving†

OPERATING SKILLS
Developing Direct Reports and Others‡; Directing Others*; Managing and Measuring Work†

COURAGE
Conflict Management‡

ORGANIZATIONAL POSITIONING SKILLS
Communicating Effectively*/†

PERSONAL AND INTERPERSONAL SKILLS
Customer Focus*; Negotiating‡; Building Effective Teams‡; Acting with Honor and Character*/†

* Price-of-admission; †Competitive edge; ‡Differentiator | From Lominger International/Kornferry
**Individual Development Planning Process**

**Step 1: Preparing for the IDP Discussion**
- **Supervisor**
  - Know:
    - CDER and Division goals
    - Job requirements
    - Current performance
    - Development needs
    - Resources available
- **Employee**
  - Know:
    - Duties and responsibilities
    - Strengths
    - Development needs
    - Development goals

**Steps 2 and 3: The IDP Discussion/Creating a Draft IDP and Finalizing the IDP**
- **Both**
  - Discuss IDP process
  - Review job requirements
  - Assess strengths and developmental needs
  - Identify developmental actions
  - Create IDP

**Step 4: IDP Implementation and Follow-up**
- **Supervisor**
  - Monitor progress
  - Provide feedback
  - Create opportunities for practice
- **Employee**
  - Participate
  - Apply new skills
  - Keep supervisor informed

**Both**
- Review IDP Progress
- Discuss changes
- Adjust IDP, if necessary
### A Note on IDPs

**Individual Development Plan (IDP) Worksheet**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Developmental Action</th>
<th>Measure Of Success</th>
<th>Resources Required</th>
<th>Supervisor’s Role</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Strategic Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The knowledge/skill/ability or competency to be developed. This learning goal must be identified before the appropriate developmental action can be chosen.</td>
<td>The specific activities that the employee will engage in to achieve the learning goal.</td>
<td>The performance measure that will indicate successful completion of the developmental action.</td>
<td>The resources that are necessary to engage in the developmental action. Resources may include funds, work hours, other employees (e.g., subject matter expert), job aids, documentation, etc.</td>
<td>What the supervisor will do to support the employee during this process. This support will always include regular feedback.</td>
<td>The dates that the developmental action will begin and end.</td>
<td>The CDER strategic goal that the developmental action supports.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Not maximally effective in the absence of a framework (common vocabulary)
- Solely focusing on technical knowledge, skills, and abilities is a common pitfall
- It can be a challenge (and a chore) to consider strengths, developmental needs, and personal development goals (short- and long-term)
- A developmental plan without developmental assignments is a piece of paper (implementation and follow-up)
Takeaways

– Leadership/professional development should be
  • Socialized early
  • Done in partnership
  • A conscious daily exercise (practiced)
– Explicit competency models are critical
  • Recruitment
  • Retention
  • Development
  • Promotion
– A model-informed development plan can be composed of didactic training, situational coaching, and experiential opportunities
– If individuals wait for leadership opportunities to think about leadership, it might be too late (track record vs. potential)
– Leadership can manifest at all levels of the organization (not only positional) and should be equally valued
The Hard Truth About Soft Skills: Leadership and Promotion at the US Food and Drug Administration

Issam Zineh, PharmD, MPH | Office of Clinical Pharmacology
Office of Translational Sciences | CDER | US FDA

ASCPT 2016 Annual Meeting | March 12, 2016