

from Five Steps to Building Your Team as a New Physician

Step One: Listen

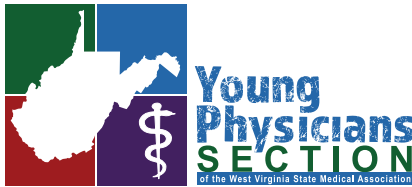
Listening to the concerns of those who work on the team, without interrupting or trying to immediately solve the concern, is fundamental to good team building. A good habit is to practice being able to repeat back to the person not only what their concern is but why it affects their ability to get their work done. Physicians are natural problem solvers and sometimes you will be the only one with the authority to change what needs changing.

Step Two: Design Workflow

Achieving value and high performance in the current system requires a deliberate design of your and your co-workers workflow. Each step of care involves input, processing, and output (which feeds the next step in the process). Understanding how and when to do your part will have a dramatic effect on the ability of the other team members to do their part and get their work done. How you do your documentation and when you do your work will have a large impact on the overall team and an enormous impact on the financial bottom line of your organization. Similarly, how they prepare your materials or update charts will have a large impact on your ability to complete your required tasks as well. You all need each other for the team to consistently win.

Step Three: Learn Influence Skills

Recognize that medical school left you with an enormous gap in your social skill set. Complete your education on how to effectively influence others outside your direct supervision. Medical school is primarily focused on verifying that you have the cognitive ability to establish diagnoses and recommend reasonable treatment. Building teams is a completely different task. The good news is team building is a learnable, real skill and with dedicated effort you can master it in less than six months. The science of behavioral psychology has cracked the code on a number of fundamental human laws of behavior and decision making in the past decade and smart physician leaders can understand how to utilize these to build great teams. Three beginner books to start with are "[The Like Switch](#) by FBI Agent Jack Schafer", "[Negotiating with Giants](#) by the famed Negotiator Peter Johnston" and "[7 Triggers to Yes](#) by ProEd Corporation's President Russell H. Granger." For doctors, the nice thing about these books is they are based on science, not personal philosophy - and the ideas in them get results - just like strong medicine. Download them and listen in your car or on your morning run. They will take about two weeks to learn from and they will dramatically affect your ability to affect your environment.



Step Four: Set Team Cohesion as the Top Priority

I learned this in a very personal way when working as a Chief Surgeon on a US Army Forward Surgical Team for a year in Afghanistan with a group of 20 or so other soldiers. When deciding to intervene or confront a team member, ask yourself first, "Is this affecting team cohesion?" Military strategies often focus first and foremost on splitting the enemy's team in any way possible. Fractured teams cannot effectively function. They waste time, people, and resources against internal conflict and disrupt all components of the workplace. Lack of cohesion is a primary driver of burnout with physicians and nurses in the US healthcare system. Place cohesion as your number one priority and team decisions become more straightforward.

Step Five: Directly Influence Your EHR Design

The design of the Electronic Health Record is the single most disruptive element of the current healthcare system. It is having a massive impact on doctor and nurse satisfaction and is disrupting the ability of workers at all levels to get their work done. Without practicing physician leadership in the design of the systems, a healthcare team can only hope to achieve average measurable success. It takes time to work with programmers and computer system authorities, but the result of a successful collaboration affects every doctor and nurse who has to use the system to efficiently and safely care for patients. This includes helping the computer system builders to integrate new JACHO requirements or other mandates in a way that does not further overburden frontline professionals. As the new physician you are in a unique position to effectively articulate how certain mandates can be better designed. At our hospital we have a Physician Workflow Group that provides immediate and direct feedback on the Electronic Health Record. You should too.

In summary, if you want to have the best team and love your new job: listen, design your workflow, learn influence skills, set team cohesion as a top priority, and directly influence your EHR design. Sound like a tall order? It's simpler than organic chemistry and I know you are up to the task.

Peter D. Ray, MD