



NASTAD™

NATIONAL ALLIANCE OF STATE
& TERRITORIAL AIDS DIRECTORS

Leadership Development

Issue Brief No. 2

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Skills that Strengthen HIV/AIDS and Viral Hepatitis Programs

In 2008, NASTAD received funding from the Johnson & Johnson Foundation to conduct an assessment of its membership on their leadership and workforce development needs. NASTAD conducted a multi-modal assessment across its membership and their staff in the summer of 2008. One-hundred-fifteen respondents provided a wealth of information on the issues currently impacting their workforce and leadership. In Part 2 of this series, NASTAD reports on what respondents said are key skills that strengthen a health department HIV/AIDS and viral hepatitis program and the important leadership skills for those who direct them.

SKILLS THAT STRENGTHEN HIV/AIDS AND VIRAL HEPATITIS PROGRAMS

*If you want a good AIDS program in your state, over and over again I am convinced that you have to have good leadership and management at the highest level because of the way it trickles down.
Tom Liberti (FL), 2008 NASTAD Chair*

In the survey NASTAD conducted for this assessment, we asked respondents to rate the importance of several potential leadership qualities for effective HIV/AIDS and viral hepatitis leadership. Survey respondents rated creating/inspiring vision, confidence and persistence as the most important qualities. Passion and commitment were two other key themes in both the survey and qualitative data. Respondents said that passion needs to be present to inspire confidence, trust and credibility.

Across all respondents, vision came through as a central component of effective leadership. Many respondents talked about having leaders with vision who could then ensure that their staff had effective management skills. Credibility/trust, knowledge, the ability to manage change, effective communications, managing up and down within their health departments, effective public policy skills and political savvy were other key themes that emerged in our discussion of important leadership qualities.

While there are a lot of qualities necessary for an effective leader, respondents acknowledged that there are different types of leaders and that there is no one model for effective leadership. Although respondents said their staff would benefit from leadership and management skills building, respondents did note a considerable range and type of skills possessed by their staff that serve to strengthen their programs. Respondents most often referenced knowledge of the epidemic/programs and experience, followed closely by a passion, or compassion, for the work and the people/communities their staff works with. Dedication and flexibility were additional themes across both the assessment and focus group/interview respondents. Other key skills that strengthen HIV/AIDS and viral hepatitis, according to our respondents, include effective communication skills, persistence/resilience, team-orientation, and analytical skills.

The following includes specific perspectives expressed by respondents across these various leadership qualities.

Creating and Inspiring Vision

One of the chief things which emerged from our assessment was the importance of HIV/AIDS and viral hepatitis program leaders having and inspiring vision. This includes the ability to view the program in the context of the bigger picture and the ability to take a long view and link programs to goals.

An efficiently run program by a manager may not be effective. It won't waste money, it will keep track of the dollars and make sure dollars keep coming in and will go by the book, but its not going to go very far towards preventing the disease or improving access to care. You need someone with vision and the ability to articulate that vision for that to happen.

Knowledge and Experience

Knowledge and experience were noted by several respondents as a necessary component of an effective HIV/AIDS or viral hepatitis leader. Aspects of knowledge specifically noted by respondents included the following:

I think there can be successful leaders of different models. Not every leader has to be the outspoken front person. There are quiet leaders too. There are AIDS directors that may not always be the first to speak up and it may not seem that they are the most articulate, but they have their bases covered and they know what they are doing. Its not like we are looking for one model.

- Extensive program knowledge base and great corporate knowledge of community partners;
- Knowledge of at risk populations and their communities;
- Knowledge of working at the community level;
- Knowledge of STD/HIV prevention and care, disease intervention specialist activities, and, management of community needs and responses; and
- Ability to listen, digest and learn.

I think that leadership means not only being knowledgeable about what the programs are that you are responsible for, but also being able to manage the environment and to get ahead of and anticipate issues and make really difficult decisions. And you need to know what kind of input you need and to sustain and nurture the strategic relationships you need to get the input to make those decisions.

Analytical Skills and Big Picture Thinking

Akin to knowledge, many respondents talked about the importance of a leader having effective analytical skills, such as skills in critical thinking and problem solving, conceptual frameworks, and the ability to understand the population and to come up with effective recommendations and strategies for the diverse populations in the area.

Passion/Compassion

Another aspect of leadership that was echoed throughout responses was the need to convey a passion for the work and mission of HIV/AIDS and viral hepatitis programs. Respondents felt that effective leaders had to convey a compassion for the people impacted by the disease. Without this, respondents said, directors would be hard-pressed to garner the support needed to make their programs work.

Dedication, Persistence and Resilience

Along with passion, respondents talked about the need for effective leaders to demonstrate a dedication to the agency and to the cause of HIV/AIDS and viral hepatitis prevention, care and treatment. In many cases, respondents highlighted dedication to the cause in the face of apathetic or non-existent support and outright opposition to effective programming from within the bureaucracy. It also had to do with a willingness to work in a bureaucratic system that is not viewed positively by some communities because of historical abuses and cultural incompetence. Finally, dedication means working in less than stellar conditions, such as the challenges in rural and remote areas.

We're living in a society where, frankly, government workers are seen as problematic...some of us are thick-skinned enough to move on with our lives and work within that system, but other people are very sensitive to that and its very difficult to get those people to put up with that [attitude]. A common interaction many of us have that work with communities is that a lot of folks say they're glad we are doing that, and its not based on the job but the mythology of what it means to be a government employee.

Flexibility

Many respondents also talked about the need for effective leaders to be change agents in their programs, citing qualities such as quick learning, creative, flexible and team-oriented.

Communication and Team Building

Effective communication in its myriad forms was also mentioned as an essential component of effective leadership. Effective grant writing, evaluation and written and verbal communication skills are important, as are listening, problem solving, being able to communicate complex information simply and effectively educating and persuading people (both within and outside the program). Two key aspects of communication are to build teams and to model expectations for staff.

KEY SKILLS OF AN AIDS DIRECTOR

Another part of leadership is to be an advocate and to be politically savvy enough to know how to advocate what's really a small part of a much bigger health care problem in our country. I think that ability to articulate the program and see it within a larger health care reform setting is important.

Respondents listed the key skills of an effective AIDS director. Being an effective communicator emerged as a common theme throughout these skills-sets. Following are four illustrative lists.

Respondent #1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be nosy, ask lots of questions • Have good communication skills • Be able to manage chaos • Think outside the box • Have management skills
Respondent #2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have communication skills • Be agile/flexible • Be patient • Think outside the box (vision) • Know when to get out of the way • Show by example • Demonstrate the value of the work • Support cross training
Respondent #3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delegating • Listening and encouraging different opinions • Trusting people • Creating open communication • Creating a strong team • Leading by example • Managing conflicting interests • Having political savvy • Effectively recruiting from the community
Respondent #4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public health knowledge • Community awareness • Flexibility • Hiring from the community • Building relationships • Collaboration • Cultural competence

CAN LEADERSHIP BE TAUGHT?

We were also interested in hearing perspectives of respondents on what qualities they thought *could* be taught, to help best target and develop and recommend leadership training programs. The “teachability” of leadership qualities evoked strong positive and negative responses among respondents. From our online survey, many respondents felt that image, vision and persistence could be taught (See Figure 1).

I do think there is something somewhat innate about qualities relating to leadership, but I do think there are certain aspects that there can be skills building around. [People] can learn to be better public speakers, learn to be more focused in their interviews with the media, learn to be risk takers.

LEARNING FROM ONE'S PEERS

Some of these qualities may not be taught in a formal setting, but rather in some sort of mentoring capacity experiencing and being around leaders that possess these qualities.

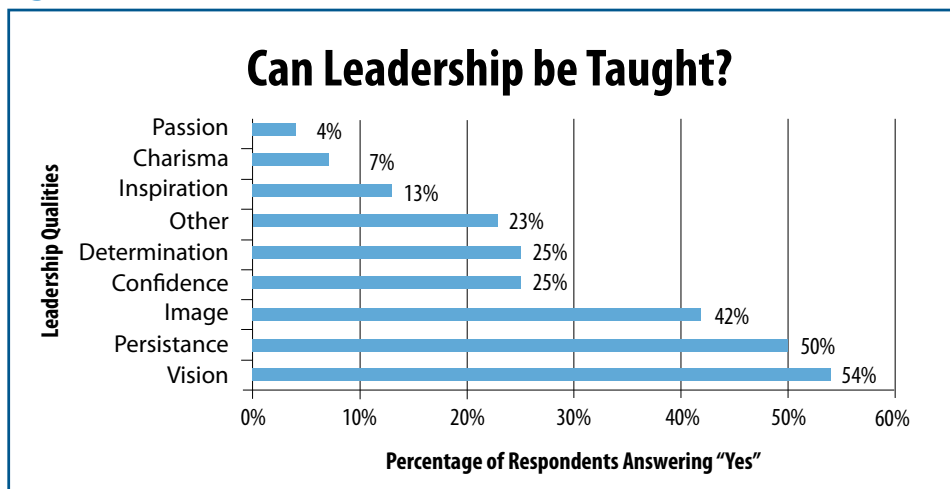
We heard several comments pointing to the idea that the skills associated with good leadership can be developed through experience and observation. Most of these comments pointed to the development of leadership skills over time. Mentoring, or coaching, was mentioned by several respondents as a strategy to cultivate, or grow, leadership.

Of course much of leadership is inherent. However you can role model all of these leadership qualities and people can emulate them. You can coach people on at least half of them.

LEADERSHIP OR MANAGEMENT?

In asking respondents to share their perspectives about the importance of leadership and management in running HIV/AIDS and viral hepatitis programs, leadership clearly emerged as an important requirement of an effective program. Furthermore, leadership was

Figure 1



defined as something distinct from management. But there did seem to be consensus that effective management is also an important element of a successful program, whether or not that is the directors' forte. It is important to ensure that there are clear expectations that both are needed.

Leadership and management can be very distinctive. You can have managers who know how to lead but a leader doesn't have to be a manager. Many great leaders do less management because they are busy leading. They are busy identifying the vision, operating the vision, implementing the vision and the managers are the ones doing the structural content.

RESPONSIBILITY TO STAFF

Across the focus group and key informant interviews, respondents pointed to the need for effective leaders to support, mentor, protect and grow staff. Some of this is in recognition of the aging public health workforce, with some respondents talking about their responsibility to cultivate new leaders and new staff. Other comments indicated that leaders have responsibility to create a vision and communicate a commitment and passion for the job to model effective leadership for staff.

I think its my obligation as a supervisor to protect my staff from that upper crap that is negative. I think they get enough stress from what they're doing that they don't need that internal bureaucracy. That is my job as a supervisor – to interpret that and manage it in a positive way.

Empowerment emerged as another theme, with some respondents identifying the giving away of power to staff as an important quality of an effective leader.

The other leadership quality that I think we need to focus on is empowerment of staff and recruitment of talented staff and support of talented staff. We still see the AIDS director power-control model out there. I honestly think leadership is empowering and supporting staff and bringing them in, not being so controlling as sometimes we see.

THE WAY AHEAD: CREATING AND INSPIRING LEADERSHIP AND VISION

We need to know where we are going as leaders in order to determine how to lead someone else.

A central rationale for NASTAD's leadership development needs assessment was the desire to identify the leadership needs of current and potential future AIDS directors so that NASTAD can effectively advocate for a response to these needs, including the types of technical assistance and training NASTAD itself can offer. Going forward, NASTAD will be integrating many of these concepts of leadership into its online and in-person leadership tools for new and emerging leaders of HIV, STD and viral hepatitis programs. The wisdom and lessons on visioning and being

an effective leader by veteran directors will be a central component of this toolbox.

One of the things that distinguishes [AIDS directors] throughout the years is their relative willingness to stick their necks out a little bit based on their passion for their cause and their ability to assess where there are real boundaries, where there are imagined boundaries and where they can push the envelope a little bit.

ABOUT THIS SERIES

This Leadership Development Report and Issue Brief series outlines the key findings and recommendations from an assessment of AIDS directors and lead HIV/AIDS and viral hepatitis program staff in 2008 through funding from the Johnson & Johnson Foundation. The entire series includes:

- *Leadership Development Issue Brief #1: Workforce Skills and Competencies*

- *Leadership Development Issue Brief #2: Skills That Strengthen AIDS Programs*
- *Leadership Development Issue Brief #3: Workforce Recruitment and Retention Challenges and Responses*
- *In Focus: Fostering Minority Leadership in Health Departments*
- *Leadership Development Issue Brief #4: Skills Building Needs and Desired Modalities*

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National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors
444 North Capitol Street, NW, Suite 339, Washington, DC 20001-1512
Phone (202) 434-8090 Fax (202) 434-8092 E-mail: nastad@NASTAD.org

Julie M. Scofield, Executive Director
Heather Hauck, Chair