

Three Traits of a Successful Service Line Director

"One of the most important success factors to service line management is having an effective infrastructure in place that is led by a service line director," says Joe Tomaro, senior vice president at Accelero Health Partners. The degree to which a service line director can support coordination of team meetings and initiatives, review and advance program performance markers, and facilitate relationships with key physicians is critical to a

successful program. The musculoskeletal service line directors included in this case study attribute their success to strengths in the following three areas, all of which can be applied to any service line: organizational skills, relationship building, and business planning and execution. "I think those are the three key traits that hospitals should look for in a service line director," says Tomaro.



Trait #1: Organizational Skills

Barbara Wolfe, director of service line development at Randolph Hospital in Asheboro, NC, brings structure and organization to her management of the service line. Although these skills may not come naturally to all service line directors, they can apply some of her best practices.

Wolfe's organizational system includes three elements. The first element is being able to identify a key issue when you hear it in a meeting. The second element is to push to understand the key issue. And the third element is to get the commitment from the individuals who can make the changes.

Working on multiple products at one time can be a bit overwhelming and the only way to be effective is to develop a system to organize the information. "When my hospital champion walks

into my office, I should be able to answer any question she has about any nuances of the service line." Wolfe manages meeting agendas and keeps the most important issues in front of the people who can ultimately move the product forward. "The only way to do that is with a system of organization," she says.

She knows the importance of staying on top of commitments and has developed a system that she uses to track commitments and progress. It is a "master meeting" spreadsheet that includes individuals' task commitments and completion dates that all meeting attendees can access to track progress. Wolfe e-mails commitment reminders to people as an effective way of keeping team members focused and on task.

The spreadsheet is an invaluable tool that eliminates the need to create a to-do list for each member of the team. When Wolfe needs to research an issue or commitment, she simply refers to the "master meeting" spreadsheet. "When I close the spreadsheet, I don't lie awake at night thinking about anything because it's all right there," she says.

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Mike Beam
Service line director
Baxter Regional Medical Center

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Trait #2: Relationship Building

According to Mike Beam, service line director at Baxter Regional Medical Center in Mountain Home, AR, the most important role he plays is in relationship building with primary care physicians (PCPs) in the rural communities the hospital serves.

Beam takes a personalized approach by conducting one-on-one visits with area physicians to discuss treatments and rehabilitation services provided at Baxter's Human Motion Institute. Because the market is rural, word of mouth is critical. These visits have provided Beam with valuable information and networking opportunities, and have established strong relationships with community PCPs. He has extended his one-on-one visits to include physician assistants and nurse practitioners, as well. Beam understands that these mid-level practitioners can influence referral patterns and are important to the referral source integration process.

While in the hospital, Beam likens his role to that of a project manager. He helps his teams accomplish their goals by soliciting feedback, facing issues, making decisions collaboratively, and moving forward without reservations. "I think quiet leadership is the best way to get something done," Beam says.

He praises team members at all levels for embracing a hospital culture that is patient-focused and has a strong, shared desire to make a difference. Attending meetings and engaging in spontaneous conversations in person, rather than by phone or e-mail, is important to Beam. "The talk in the hallway is an underestimated way of doing business that has always been beneficial for me," he says.

"The service line director must be able to relate and integrate with a lot of different people—physicians, to staff, to administration. The ability to communicate and relate to the entire staff is critical to the success of a service line director."

Joe Tomaro
Senior vice president
Accelerero Health Partners

Trait #3: Business Planning and Execution

Herb Caillouet is the musculoskeletal service line director at the University of Alabama-Birmingham (UAB) Highlands. The academic medical center's service line combines orthopaedics, rheumatology, physical medicine and rehabilitation, occupational health, and industrial medicine services to provide patients with a multidisciplinary approach to orthopaedic treatment.

Caillouet, when describing the UAB Highlands' service line structure, uses a tricycle analogy. The front wheel and pedals represent the clinical care of the patients and serve as the source of momentum that puts the tricycle in motion.

The two back wheels represent the physicians' training and research at the UAB School of Medicine. Caillouet explains that if clinical care isn't advancing the service line, then there aren't any patients available for physician training and research.

"My role is to keep everyone aware of our focus and to coordinate the activities of the service leaders, the physician leaders, and the departmental leaders so that we're achieving the net result," he says.



Caillouet strategizes with these leaders on business and clinical trends. "It's about bringing the right players to the table at the right time with the right data to help them see what our opportunity is and influencing them to work together to cast a vision and operationally make it come through," he says.

The strength of the UAB system, says Caillouet, is that service line directors meet regularly to discuss and share ideas from a business model perspective. It is an opportunity for service line directors to learn from each other, solve issues, and experience the value transfer between service lines. "We have a unique service line approach that allows us to talk about what's going on, update one another, and share best practices," he says.

The success of the service line is based on the service line director's ability to maintain focus and direction, foster good working relationships, and to strategize the business plan. In addition to these attributes, it is essential that the service line director is empowered by hospital leadership to make changes. While the service line director is ultimately responsible for the success of team projects, team members do not report directly to the service line director, which, at times, can be difficult to navigate.

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Herb Caillouet
Service line director
UAB Highlands

"I learned early on that if you get the CEO to sit the vested parties down in a room and explain to them that this is a priority, everyone gets onboard," says Wolfe, who is a member of the senior leadership team at Randolph Hospital.