

Preface

THIS IS THE first book I have published, but the second I have written. My two daughters, 12-year-old Hannah and 14-year-old Rebekah, dismissed my first attempt as “a thousand pages of boring medical stuff.” They were right. I spent too much time rehashing hospital industry woes—“admiring the problems,” so to speak—and not enough on practical solutions. It was also boring because, in trying to sound intellectual, I lost my true voice: that of a healthcare leader who lives the challenges of my audience every day. Plus, it was way too long.

This book is different. I wrote it because I am passionate about physician engagement and know how to accomplish it. Engaging physicians is the first skill executives must learn and apply to prepare their health systems for the changes ahead.

Over the course of my more than 20 years as a physician, health system CEO, and consultant, I’ve become convinced that getting physicians to feel *ownership* in the success of their hospitals and clinics is the key to overcoming our challenges in healthcare. I’ve also realized how hard it is to arrive at physician ownership. There is no precise road map, but the starting point is clear, and that is physician engagement.

Even so, I didn’t plan to write this book until a particular physician convinced me. I was telling my wife, Elizabeth, a hospitalist, about a physician engagement initiative I had just implemented in a health system. Elizabeth possesses a natural wisdom that enables her to effortlessly pinpoint flaws in seemingly flawless plans, and

to see solutions that have evaded me for days. In other words, she is the brains in our marriage. After listening approvingly (and she doesn't always listen to me approvingly), Elizabeth said, "I wish all healthcare leaders would implement similar initiatives—just imagine the power of doctors and executives working together to improve healthcare."

With those simple words, the clouds parted. The need for a guidebook on physician engagement became clear. With my background and experience—and passion for the subject—I felt compelled to write it.

In this book, I have tried to speak plainly. The best executives I have met are plain talkers who value directness in others. They also value humility born of hard experience and the knowledge that no one has solved all of the tough problems in healthcare. Keeping those executives in mind helped me to stay in my own skin rather than slip into the persona of a professor stroking his beard.

I have also worked hard to keep my recommendations practical. This book is me, an industry insider, telling you, fellow healthcare executives, about what I have implemented, helped to implement, or seen implemented. The examples are all real, although I have modified them to protect confidentiality.

Finally, I kept this book short for healthcare leaders who don't have the time or inclination to read long books. I couldn't get all of my ideas down to a single, "good to great" phrase in the vein of Jim Collins, but at least it's nowhere near a thousand pages.

I hope you will find this book helpful and enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it. If you do, all credit goes to my wife and daughters.

Andy
Andrew C. Agwunobi, MD, MBA