Preface

THERE ARE GOOD leaders, then there are *exceptional leaders*.

We wrote this sentence for our first and second editions (2006 and 2015). Since then, the amount of change in healthcare leadership development has been amazing, especially as it relates to the use of competencies. When we wrote the first edition, leadership competencies were not used in a systematic way in many healthcare organizations; by the time of the second edition, most organizations had started to use competencies in some way. The conversation and work around getting a better understanding of leadership keeps growing, and organizations have become more advanced in their approach to leadership development. Sadly, the COVID-19 pandemic upended leadership development within almost all organizations, including healthcare. Happily, as many of these organizations rebuild their approaches to leadership development, they are finding a wealth of new tools to make these initiatives more tailored, efficient, and impactful. Even though the industry still has a lot to improve, we are excited by how far it has come and its future potential. We are particularly energized by how much traction strategic talent management has gained, with leadership competencies providing an organizing framework. The most advanced of these high-performance work systems touch almost every aspect of management practices, including hiring, selection, development, performance management, promotions, and even job design. Competencies help by providing a common behavioral language for clearly communicating performance needs. And this clarity makes a difference in organizational performance—quality, patient safety, employee engagement, financial results, and community impact.

For most of us, identifying an exceptional leader is easier than explaining what makes that person exceptional. The answer to "What makes a leader exceptional?" is simple: competencies. Because we explain the term *competencies* in the Introduction, we give just a basic definition here. Leadership competencies are a set of skills, knowledge, values, and traits that guide a leader's performance, behavior, interaction, and decisions.

Any leadership book will tell you *how* to make a leader exceptional. This book offers that and more: it tells you *what* makes a leader exceptional. We define these competencies and fully explain what they mean.

In 2006, for our first edition, we set out to identify these 16 competencies for three reasons:

1. Many good leaders in healthcare really want to be great leaders, and they want it for the right reason—to make a real difference to the patients and communities they serve.
2. Most healthcare leaders do not have many mentors, do not attend many leadership programs, or are not given meaningful skill-development opportunities very often.
3. In this time often marked by the war for talent, leaders need to be better at assessing the skills and competencies of other leaders, especially those they are hiring.

At the writing of this third edition, the whole health ecosystem is going through the biggest changes it has seen in more than 50 years. Some leaders are becoming fatigued by the challenges they face, but others are excited to see the biggest opportunities in their careers to be part of remaking the entire healthcare system into a far more powerful delivery system for human health and community vitality. Also, as we think about the original reasons for our selection of the 16 competencies, we find that those reasons continue to guide our opinions.

We chose the 16 competencies for our model because (a) they are the ones most often identified by search committees as separating exceptional leaders from good leaders; (b) they relate well to other highly regarded competency sets that we have developed and/or reviewed; and (c) they drive the most effective leadership success that we have seen. And since the first and second editions, we have found that many organizations have adopted these 16 competencies both for their organizational competencies and as a curriculum guide for their internal leadership development programs. Even though their uses may have changed over the years, the competencies themselves have not. They are still the most in-demand competencies in healthcare—still the markers of exceptional leadership.

WHY ANOTHER BOOK ON LEADERSHIP?

We asked this question in 2006 and 2015 when we wrote the first and second editions; the question remains very relevant today. Many more books have been added to the vast library of leadership literature. But many of them still belong to what Hogan and Kaiser (2005, 171) call the "troubadour" literature, or books that fill the business sections of airport bookstores. We agree with their statement that, "Despite its popularity, the troubadour tradition is a vast collection of opinions

with very little supporting evidence; it is entertaining but unreliable." We did not list any titles, but we know our readers will get the point.

Healthcare Leadership Is Different

Although many leadership issues are common across industries, healthcare has many unique leadership challenges. The relationships, life-and-death nature of the work, emotional demands, and financial challenges in this industry are different from those in other fields. COVID-19 also brought enormous challenges to healthcare, and its shock waves will echo in the field for many years to come. Because of these unique qualities, the healthcare field needs its leaders to have a different approach as well. The competencies in this book give healthcare leaders this edge.

Healthcare Needs Great Leaders

As the healthcare industry faces the big changes brought about by COVID-19, labor shortages, value-based reimbursement, population health management, and cost and capacity pressures, as well as the coming changes from personalized medicine, consumer-driven care, and heightening expectations from our communities and other stakeholders, one of the biggest imperatives of the next decade in healthcare will be preparing leaders to handle the system changes these opportunities and challenges will bring. All of these challenges will continue in this high-stakes environment, where disruptive innovations can change the future of a healthcare organization in a heartbeat.

The Science of Leadership Keeps Evolving

Although there has been a lot of progress in the past decade in the science of leadership assessment and development, extracting insights from the scientific literature remains difficult, and the relative value of different service vendors is hard to evaluate. Bookstores are full of books on leadership, but most reflect the views of a single successful leader, author, or firm, and many are just stories or personal observations not grounded in the growing scientific knowledge base.

In this book, wherever possible, we ground each area of leadership performance with contemporary research. In doing so, we give you the most advanced thinking on how to improve in these competencies.

Leadership Competencies Are Not All Equally Important

When we wrote the first edition of this book, leadership competencies were not commonly used in the healthcare sector. But since then, many consulting firms, healthcare organizations, and professional associations have developed their own leadership competency models. If we compiled all the competencies from these models, we would end up with hundreds of them.

Having too many competencies is not useful for development planning. It is also not helpful for selecting leaders for different roles. We are not saying that there are only 16 competencies that matter. But we do believe that these are the ones that make the most difference between good leaders and great leaders. That's why we focus on these 16 competencies that seem to distinguish between good leadership and great leadership. If your goal is to be an exceptional leader, these are the competencies you need to master.

Having a Leadership Competency Model Does Not Guarantee Success

Another concern with competency models is that some people put too much emphasis on them. We agree that having and using a good model is critical for improving organizational performance through leadership. But adopting a competency model does not move leadership forward all on its own. Ulrich, Zenger, and Smallwood (1999, 27) wrote about the "search for a 'holy grail' of leadership attributes" and how adopting one does not necessarily mean that leadership issues are resolved. The Exceptional Leadership Competency Model presented in this book is a practical and focused tool, but we don't claim that it is the end-all, be-all tool of leadership development.

Leadership Development Is *Your* Responsibility

Exceptional leaders take responsibility for their own development. They don't wait for their superiors to coach them or for their organizations to provide them with opportunities. If you want to be an exceptional leader, you have to learn your development needs and find your own ways to improve on them.

WHAT WILL YOU GAIN FROM READING THIS BOOK?

Our goal is to show you the competencies that define an exceptional leader. Throughout the book we give you tools to help you and your team develop your leadership potential and improve your organization's performance.

A Deeper Understanding of Leadership

By reading and reflecting on each of the 16 competencies, you will gain additional insight into leadership and learn the key qualities that make leaders highly effective.

Guidance in Coaching and Developing Skills

This book gives you practical suggestions for developing leadership skills that you can apply right away. You can use this book to plan your own development or to support others in their development. Executive coaches can use the material to help guide and shape the behavior of leaders they are coaching. Executives can use the discussion to advise and mentor their direct reports on their leadership behavior.

Guidelines for Assessing Executive Candidates

This book is an excellent guide for assessing candidates for executive leadership roles. You can use the 16 competencies as a benchmark to create interview questions and evaluate leadership capability.

Counsel on Avoiding Derailment

No one sets out to derail their career on purpose. But career derailments often happen. Skill deficits in any of these areas can slow down or even disrupt your leadership career. Knowing what you need to improve can help you avoid derailing your own career.

Guidance for Physician Leadership Development

Many organizations have recognized the importance of developing physician leaders and giving them more leadership roles. This book can serve as an excellent introduction to the key behaviors of effective physician leaders.

A Foundation for Customized Leadership Competency Models

Because the competencies in this book focus on exceptional leadership, you may find them useful as a starting point to create your own competency models.

A Practical Foundation for Teaching Leadership

The material in this book is suitable for academic instruction—for example, as a supplement to theory-based texts. You can use the competencies as stand-alone topics, and the vignettes at the start of each chapter as conversation starters. The self-assessment and development tips also work well for career-development planning assignments. Additionally, this book can be the basis for peer-led leadership-development meetings in practice settings.

RESOURCES FOR INSTRUCTORS

If you use this book as part of a leadership or management course, you can access excellent resources for instructors. The book's contents are built around a major case study (St. Nicholas Health System) that is followed throughout the book. This case study is complex enough to give instructors many options for using it. Sprinkled throughout the book are many questions that can be used during classroom discussion. Also, each chapter in the first four parts of the book has short case studies at its end: answer guides are available in the instructor resources. The instructor resources also include an extensive set of PowerPoints and additional discussion questions and answer guides. If you adopt this book for use in a course, resources can be requested by e-mailing hapbooks@ache.org.

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