

Developing Others When No One is Around

By Ed O'Neil, PhD, MPA

One trait of all successful leaders is the ability to develop others around them. But how do you do this when the people you are developing are not physically present?

There is a [fourfold return](#) on investing in people — you do not want to lose any of this investment because of remote working. There are some unique obstacles and opportunities in these challenging times. These are some things that leaders can do.

- 1. Validate development** — Knowing what to work on right now is challenging. Many people are struggling to balance new work situations with a massive rearrangement of personal and home commitments. Taking time for professional development may seem selfish and not particularly mission critical. Leaders can **reaffirm the value** of professional development and show their personal support for working on it even with the new and competing demands. This support is key to enhancing motivation in normal times — reaffirming your commitment to staff now can go even further.
- 2. Review and reassess development goals** — One place to start the work is to ask your team to take a look at their **current development plan** and assess if it is focused on improving in the right areas given today's challenges. You will want to help tease out development that has more long-term value than things that might be useful in the COVID-19 moment. Help identify those things that can be done while sheltering in place. If they don't have a development plan, now is a great time to create one — [here](#) are some questions and a template to help them get started.
- 3. Help them focus** — After staff review or create a new development plan, you can help immensely by helping them to focus on **one goal**. You can be a good partner in brainstorming creative ways to do this at home. You should advocate for a goal that is small, practical, doable, and something where significant progress could be made in a month.
- 4. Set aside time for check-ins** — This is an important step in validation and measuring progress. It doesn't require a separate meeting; set aside **five minutes** in a one-on-one call to discuss progress, what has been learned, questions being raised, or insights gained. Make sure to focus on a specific goal.

About the Quick-Takes Series

This miniseries, part of the [Medicaid Leadership Exchange podcast](#), provides guidance to help Medicaid leaders during the COVID-19 crisis. The series, which includes companion videos and tip sheets, is developed in partnership with the National Association of Medicaid Directors and the Center for Health Care Strategies through support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. For more information, visit www.chcs.org/quicktakes.

5. **Use delegation** — Work is changing for everyone and so should our patterns of delegation, but the novelty of the current situation may cause leaders to delegate less and with many more prescriptions. Resist this. Part of the reason to develop your team is to make delegation easier and more **integrated with their development and organizational goals**. If the person you are working with on improving wants to be more creative, have them design new ways for staff to interact online. If they want to be more systematic, let them lead the effort to design the new work tracking and accountability system for virtual teams.
6. **Use partners** — As the lead, you are in a position to know when two individuals are working on the same or similar goals. Tell them you would like them to do some of this work together so they can share resources, challenges, and gain a richer insight into how they want to develop.

For many, this may be a great time to work on development for many different reasons, from having the time, to needing the distraction, or wanting to think about life after sequestering. Your role as leader is to validate the idea, help structure the work, aid them in being creative, and assisting with integrating back into work.

About Ed O'Neil

Ed O'Neil, PhD, MPA, is the owner of O'Neil & Associates, a management consulting and leadership development firm focused on change and renewal in the health care system. He was previously professor in the Departments of Family and Community Medicine, Preventive and Restorative Dental Sciences, and Social and Behavioral Sciences at the University of California, San Francisco, and director of the Center for the Health Professions, a training institute that he created in 1992. His work across three decades has focused on changing the US health care system through improved policy and leadership. To learn more, visit www.oneil-and-associates.com.

About the National Association of Medicaid Directors

The National Association of Medicaid Directors supports Medicaid directors in administering the program in cost-effective, efficient, and visionary ways that enable the over 70 million Americans served by Medicaid to achieve their best health and to thrive in their communities. To learn more, visit www.medicaiddirectors.org.

About the Medicaid Leadership Institute

The *Medicaid Leadership Institute*, an initiative of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation led by the Center for Health Care Strategies, helps Medicaid directors develop the skills and expertise necessary to successfully lead their state programs in an ever-changing policy environment. To learn more, visit www.chcs.org/medicaid-leaders.