



## First Who, Then What— Nurturing Leadership in the ASC

Regina Boore, RN, BSN, MS

**M**anagers exist in every organization. So why is it so difficult to find real leaders? Environmental forces at play in the ambulatory surgery center (ASC) industry demand leaders who can ensure business success and create a top-performing center. The bar has been raised dramatically in what was already a regulation-intensive industry. Recent expansion of the Medicare Conditions for Coverage mandates a much greater investment in staff education and training, facility-wide involvement in quality management and improvement activities, and scrupulous adherence to infection control practices and procedures.

Over the last few months, many ASC managers have responded with outrage and frustration over what they perceive to be unreasonable and

untenable demands on their business operation. ASCs have suffered frozen Medicare reimbursement rates for six years, managed increasing costs of labor, supplies, and equipment, and now they face threats of cuts to Medicare as the federal government moves forward with healthcare reform.

Against this backdrop, it is understandable that these new regulatory demands have met intense resistance. However, ophthalmic ASCs, more than any other specialty, are dependent upon participation in the Medicare program for their survival and success. The comment period on these regulatory revisions has long since come and gone and ophthalmic ASCs are now forced to operate in a new reality. Intensive, frequent, unannounced regulatory surveys are the new routine, and operators who refuse to embrace

these new demands and keep their house in order at all times are at risk.

Over the last several months I have worked with numerous ASCs that have been compelled to implement drastic changes to their operation in order to thwart Medicare decertification on the heels of a grueling, unannounced survey. In most cases these are older, part-time, practice-owned ASCs. In all cases, there was a lack of nursing leadership in the organization. The days of getting by without a competent, qualified RN manager, well versed in and committed to regulatory compliance, are over.

Every industry and every business faces challenges, so why do some fail, some succeed, and others excel? Jim Collins, lecturer, business consultant, and author of the best-selling business book *Good to Great*, studied 1,435 companies in a multi-

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tude of industries over a five-year period to answer this question. He identified 11 that met his criteria of “great” companies. The bottom line of his research about what separates “great” organizations from “good” ones? It’s the people. He found no evidence that “great” companies had a better ability to predict the future. You cannot possibly prepare for the unknown challenges that lie ahead. In Collins’ research, your best hedge against an uncertain future is not the what, but the who—i.e., who you have on your team.

So how do you know if you have the right people on your team?

According to Collins,

- They share your core values.
- They don’t need to be tightly managed.
- They have the potential to be the best in the industry in their position.
- They understand the difference between having a job and holding a responsibility.
- If you had to do it all over again, you would hire them without hesitation.

How does your team stack up against these criteria?

ASC owners committed to great leadership should evaluate their team to ensure that the right people are in place. Leaders will not shy away from difficult decisions to get the right people in the right positions in their organization. Leaders understand that their people are the key to their success.

The recent regulatory revisions feel overwhelming to many ASC owners and operators. They are a new challenge to be met and will change the way many centers conduct business. A successful approach to compliance will integrate, to the greatest extent possible, the activities necessary to comply with these revisions into the daily operation. This will streamline processes and reduce risk exposure. Never was that old axiom more true: “You are only as strong as your weakest link.” Facility-wide engagement mandates reliance on every member of the organization to understand the regulations and his/her responsibility for ongoing compliance activities. Competent and committed ASC leaders are essential to deliver on these requirements.

There are many definitions of leadership. Peter Drucker makes the distinction this way: “Management is doing things right. Leadership is

doing the right things.” In the ASC business, staff education and training, facility-wide involvement in quality management and improvement activities, and scrupulous adherence to infection control practices and procedures are the right things to do to assure optimal patient outcomes. It has been well documented that compromise in any of these areas results in devastating consequences. There is no rational basis to debate the importance of these operating standards. ASC leaders understand this and will inspire their team to implement creative strategies and approaches to guarantee compliance with new regulations and established standards of care within existing financial constraints. **AE**

### **For further reading**

Collins, Jim. (2001). *Good to Great*. HarperBusiness.

Drucker, P. (2006). *The Effective Executive: The Definitive Guide to Getting the Right Things Done*. Harper Paperbacks.



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## **Ambulatory Surgery Center (ASC) Audio Conference**

**July 26, 2010**

**4:00 pm – 5:30 pm Eastern**

**Speaker: Regina Boore, RN, BSN, MS**

**Registration opening soon!**

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