Physicians should embrace their entrepreneurial side.


In a changing health care environment, the skills that are most valuable as leaders involve creativity, passion and flexibility. These skills give us the ability to feel more optimistic about the future than the past. Often, those of us in health care are told we’re stuck in the past, but when an organization allows team members to anticipate what care will be in 10 years, and supports calculated risk to achieve that, frustration gives way to optimism.

Successful leadership is a combination of vision, execution and personal relationships.

Adapted from Five Questions with Clinician Leaders: Tom Yackel, M.D., M.P.H., M.S., President, MCV Physicians and Senior Associate Dean for Clinical Affairs, VCU School of Medicine – Richmond, Va.

A leader has to have some sense of vision for where health care is going and where it needs to go, and also shape that vision for the team. Most physicians aren’t trained how to manage ourselves and others in cross-system team. Life and death decisions need the hierarchical, command and control process because decisions have to be split-second. Health system decisions are longer-term and require a different mindset. We need slower, more inclusive and thoughtful processes.

Leadership happens when you want the opportunity to change things and you play to your strengths.

Adapted from Five Questions with Clinician Leaders: David Perlstein, M.D., President and CEO, SBH Health System – Bronx, NY

The most important skill is a desire and willingness to listen while keeping the patient at the center. This approach helps physicians look for opportunities to improve but ensures that that patients see improvement first. Physicians are empathic by nature and that can make implementing changes hard when they impact team members. Putting patients first plays to the strength of everyone’s empathy while benefiting patients, the care team and organization.