

Hospital leaders with 10+ years of experience share pearls of wisdom

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By Mary Rechteris

With a decade or more of experience in leadership positions, the following 10 hospital executives share what they have learned throughout their career.

1. "Risk is good. And I don't mean wimpy risk; I mean material, significant risk where the downside is tremendous. I led a community hospital that had eight days of cash on hand when I arrived, as well as an academic medical center that was struggling with loss of leading physicians and with perilous finances resulting from a failed merger. In both cases, I had to take real business risks that very well could have spelled the end of the road for those great institutions. But if I had played it safe then the outcome would have been inevitably mediocre. A leader who does not take major risks might be good, but he/she will never be great."

Ellen Zane, former CEO and current vice chair of Tufts Medical Center in Boston.

2. "The goal should always be to improve access to the highest quality of medical care, enhance care for the underserved and meet the need for growth and medical research. In today's environment of state budget cuts and federal healthcare reform, we are still advocating for our patients. I aim to expand our ability to serve thousands of vulnerable children who need our care."

Robert Meyer, president and CEO of Phoenix Children's Hospital.

3. "Something I've learned in my nearly 20 years as CEO, it's essential to continuously reinvent both yourself and your organization so you're able to take advantage of opportunities that arise from sometimes unexpected places. We continue to evolve and transform with the healthcare landscape as well as the needs of our pediatric and obstetric patients, marked by the significant growth of our network and the remarkable expansion of our hospital campus, opening in late summer 2017. You must welcome reinvention to open new doors."

Christopher G. Dawes, president and CEO of Lucile Packard Children's Hospital Stanford (Calif.) and Stanford Children's Health.

4. "Embrace the sweeping changes in healthcare to help you disrupt the ridiculous pathologies of our system, what I call 'ridiculopathies.' Embrace the shift of health out to homes and neighborhoods, whether it's through urgent care, retail medicine or telehealth. Prepare doctors of the future to provide meaning, not memorize. And turn your hospital into a customer facing organization."

Stephen K. Klasko, MD, MBA, president and CEO of Thomas Jefferson University and Jefferson Health in Philadelphia.

5. "I thought that when I became a CEO, I could tell people what to do. I quickly realized that it was all about selling ideas."

Barry S. Rabner, president and CEO of Princeton HealthCare System in Plainsboro, N.J.

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6. "We must make sure we are managing our growth in a way that's responsive to our community's health needs. We must consistently look for new ways to engage with our patient families, both in providing quality care and in serving as a resource for raising healthy kids. Our goal has always been to provide the right care in the right place at the right time. We need to focus on the total health of our children — our future leaders— which starts before they come through our doors. Learning healthy habits should not just begin in kindergarten — it's a process that should start with their families and at home. We are always looking for new and better ways to increase access to care."

Christopher J. Durovich, president and CEO of Children's Health in Dallas.

7. "CEOs are frequently rushed to make decisions, but don't make a key decision without involving the people impacted. Not only does this input help produce the best answer, but it also engenders support and trust."

Tim Smith, CEO and senior vice president of Sharp Memorial Hospital in San Diego.

8. "My nursing background instilled in me the importance of putting the patient first with every decision I make. In a senior leadership role, you will encounter unexpected challenges and shifting priorities, all of which can create distractions. Being patient-centered allows me to remain on point and true to my mission of ensuring patient safety, quality of care and service excellence. The important take home message is: Don't get sidetracked by distractions. Always put the patient first!"

Maureen Pode, RN, BSN, MA, CEO of NYC Health + Hospitals/North Central Bronx.

9. "Many leaders are good at developing plans, but it's important to recognize that a plan is only a piece of paper. Successful plans require the collaborative engagement of all staff, clinical and support alike. People are your most valuable resource, so inform them well, involve them in the process and let them bring their knowledge and skills to the table to help turn your vision into a reality."

William Hicks, CEO of NYC Health + Hospitals/Bellevue.

10. "To be effective in our changing healthcare landscape, leaders need to understand how dramatic shifts in health policy affect available resources as well as the organization's strategic direction. More important, though, is to recognize that such paradigm shifts happen very rarely, and they truly present unique opportunities to reshape the work we do to address priorities — which for us means redesigning the experience of care around the patient. Embrace transformation as the rare opportunity it is."

Ernest J. Baptiste, CEO of NYC Health + Hospitals/Kings County.