



Values Based Leadership

Developing Inspirational Leaders

Interview with Aongus McGrane– Part 2

by John Frost

John Frost continues his interview with Aongus McGrane, Head of Learning & Organisational Development NHS Blood and Transplant. Part 1 can be found in the articles section on our website: <http://vbleadership.com/Articles>

John

In part 1 of the interview you spoke about some of the pragmatic actions you've taken to bring values to life; are there any other actions you take?

Aongus

Another thing we did was identify the gaps within senior leadership. It was clear a number of people were in senior positions without any formal leadership development. These are some of the biggest brains in the country and experts in their area but they hadn't had formal leadership development. So, one of the first things we did was run a senior leadership programme for three years and we used a number of Executives and OD specialist's to run assessments which we used as a gateway process to this leadership programme. Individuals could use the feedback from these assessment centres and then, if they didn't get a place on the leadership programme, they could go and improve on their skills and apply again. Those that did get a place did a thirty day programme over a year which included residential weeks away, action learning and coaching mentoring. The programme was accredited by Manchester Metropolitan University last year as well, so those who have completed the programme receive credit towards a Masters.



Aongus McGrane

John

You make a really good point there. Often organisations have people in senior leadership positions who actually, probably through no fault of their own, don't have any leadership training and if the senior teams aren't prepared to look at themselves and develop their skills first then the reality is that the rest of the organisation is not likely to take it on board.

Aongus

I think, as well, when leadership skills are not explicit for leaders it's difficult for them to pass it on. Before our leadership programme we found that our succession planning wasn't good because leaders didn't have the language or tools to develop the next layer down. Often they managed the pressures of the leadership position, but they didn't know what to do for anyone else.



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John

I can hear that you've successfully developed your senior leaders; what other measures have you taken to keep the values alive and ensure they carry on defining who you are as an organisation?

Aongus

We started looking down the organisation to see what we could do for the level below senior leaders and the level after that. Over and above mandatory training, we are working towards committing to three days of development a year for all staff and five days development for all managers. As well as that commitment, we also went out this year and listened to staff in a more in-depth way than before. We run a staff survey every year which is benchmarked against the wider NHS staff survey and from that we looked at the areas of concern and the areas we were doing well in. We wanted to look in more depth at some of the issues, so we ran a number of focus groups up and down the country and I think it was the first time that many of the staff felt like they were really listened to. We brought in someone neutral and external to run the focus groups so that staff felt they could talk about anything and the result was reams of documents telling us what the staff were saying. Much of it was around things like communication, openness, honesty. Leading directly from that we were then able to have the Chief Executive and Executives meet with staffside to discuss our strategy before it was launched to the wider organisation.

John

It's clear you're still listening to staff and their ideas, you're still showing commitment to what you're trying to be as an organisation and making people feel valued as a result and I think that's wonderful.

Aongus

It is a wonderful success story. There's still a way to go; we are a national organisation spread out over 94 centres and because of the nature of their operational roles it can be difficult to communicate with some staff. But we are in excess of six thousand people and to get as far as we have it is a massive success story. So I'm very proud as an OD specialist at how far we have come.

John

So you should be, it's a great story and the way you've reviewed and structured it is a really good example to other organisations in any sector. It shows that if you can take a values approach across six and a half thousand people these good practices can be replicated across any number of people as long as you put time and effort into it and commit to the goals you are trying to achieve. As a result it's clear that your people are geared up around the values, they aren't just a poster on the wall; they are there to define who you are and the service you are providing to your donors, to the people that use your blood and to yourselves.