

By Julie W. Wands

Success in the challenging role of correctional health care administrator depends on relationships. Every task and every decision in the workplace requires relating with others. Daniel Goleman, the often-quoted author of *Emotional Intelligence and Working with Emotional Intelligence*, described it this way: “The rules for work are changing. We’re being judged by a new yardstick: not just how smart we are, or by our training and expertise, but also by how well we handle ourselves and each other.”¹ It is the emotionally intelligent — relationship savvy — administrator that achieves the greatest success.

The role of a correctional health care administrator is demanding and constantly changing. There is pressure to do more with less. Technology increases expectations for both quality and quantity of clinical care, while at the same time, resources dwindle, health care costs rise and competition for scarce resources increases. Today, the correctional health care administrator needs more tools to manage this change.

Correctional Health Care Administration: It’s All About Relationships

The old style of command and control leadership, paramilitary-style, is ineffective. Building rapport, working collaboratively, and making the whole greater than the sum of its parts is how the correctional health care administrator will survive in today’s fast-paced, demanding environment. The tools for success are found in the realm of emotional intelligence.

Emotional Intelligence

Goleman suggests that everyone knows people who lack emotional intelligence, such as a brilliant person who is highly successful in academic endeavors but lacks common sense. Or there is the technocrat who works well with the inanimate computer, but is unable to explain how to solve a software problem in language others understand. Another example is the successful manager who is derailed when an out-of-control temper results in termination. Research by Goleman concluded that the failure of these otherwise successful individuals was a deficiency of emotional intelligence.

Emotional intelligence is defined as the set of skills needed to develop and maintain effective working relationships. Through research, independently corroborated, Goleman revealed, “emotional competencies were found to be twice as important in contributing to excellence as pure intellect and expertise.”² The scope

of emotional intelligence skills are broadly grouped into two categories “how we manage ourselves” (personal competence) and “how we handle relationships” (social competence).

Trustworthiness, a personal competence, is the basis of personal character and is necessary to develop meaningful relationships with others. Political awareness, and collaboration, both social competence skills, are discussed here as essential ingredients for success in the complex, political environment of correctional health care. These emotional intelligence skills will help the correctional health care administrator build rapport and work collaboratively with all players involved in the overall process of providing quality health care in corrections.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a personal competence skill that underlies how one manages himself or herself. This emotional intelligence skill involves integrity and honesty. In the correctional environment, as anywhere, one’s credibility and therefore influence is dependent on one’s word. In the past, people gave their word as if it were a written contract. Trust is developed when a person says something will or will not be done, and others can “take it to the bank.” Trustworthiness is the basis of work relationships that produce results.

Discipline is necessary to achieve and maintain trustworthiness. Emotional intelligence is not about perfection. The emotionally intelligent person recognizes that all circumstances affecting the ability to keep one's word cannot be controlled. And he or she knows that when such circumstances arise, they must be acknowledged to those involved and the proper adjustments made to the commitment. The emotionally intelligent person recommitments and moves on.

Trust builds rapport, and rapport builds credibility. A person who has credibility has influence with others. Influence is necessary to get the job done in the highly interdependent workplace of corrections. Goleman illustrates the relation of these competencies: "Credibility stems from integrity ... trustworthiness at work translates into letting people know one's values and principles, intentions and feelings, and acting in ways that are reliably consistent with them."³

Political Awareness

Many government workers, correctional health care administrators included, work in the most political of environments, the government, and yet cringe at the mention of politics. They behave as if ignoring politics will somehow neutralize its effects.

Political awareness is a high-level skill necessary for successful correctional health care administrators. Goleman clarified the importance of political awareness: "The inevitable politics of organizational life create competing coalitions and power struggles. A sensitivity to these political fault lines of alliance and rivalry makes a person more understanding of the underlying issues and better able to address what really matters to key decision makers."⁴

Political awareness is a social competence skill underlying how one handles relationships. It is impossible for the correctional health care administrator to accomplish the myriad of necessary tasks without the assistance of the other players in the correctional health care system. The emotionally intelligent administrator recognizes this, and uses relationship skills to foster success.

Once aware of the political structure of the work environment, formal and informal coalitions can be built with key players to achieve greater success. It is important to recognize that success is not necessarily personal, although that may be a side benefit. Success is the ability to attain the goals and objectives of the health care mission for the correctional agency.

Collaboration

Collaboration, another social competence skill, is necessary in today's environment of scarce resources. A correctional health care administrator with this emotional intelligence skill knows how to bring people to the table to manage interdisciplinary issues and resolve problems. For example, a vision to implement a cost-efficient, automated utilization review (UR) program for the health care system is approved in concept. An automated UR program provides a systematic method to evaluate and approve/disapprove requests for costly medical consults and/or treatments and,

where appropriate, recommend less costly interventions consistent with community health care standards. The administrator must guide the new initiative to completion — a task that seems straightforward, but is it really?

Upon closer review, the health care administrator recog-

nizes the initiative will take money, staff, contracting, vendors, procurement, training, deployment and oversight. And, because it is in the correctional environment, there is the added element of security. The administrator recognizes the need for support from staff in the following areas: the business office, informa-

tion technology, custody, human resources, health care and training. The health care administrator will rely on the skills of collaboration, including communication, negotiation and problem solving, as he or she works through the interdependent web of players needed to accomplish this task.

The relationships and rapport the administrator has with each of the players affected by this initiative will determine the relative success or ease with which the task can be accomplished. This is where political skill and trustworthiness can provide a solid foundation for success. To illustrate this point, Goleman quotes Seely Brown, chief scientist for Xerox Corp.: "Many people have trouble because they don't understand how you become part of a human situation, part of a relationship. It's easy to focus on cognitive ability and ignore social intelligence. But it's when you bring those together that you can create magic."⁵

The Team Approach

The social skills of cooperation and collaboration are necessary for success in the multidisciplinary environment of correctional health care administration. And the personal skill of trustworthiness must be sound, because the influence of the administrator will be tested. Political knowledge of who brings what to the table will make or break the success of the initiative. To leave out players who control resources necessary for the job will derail the program. The emotionally intelligent administrator scans the work environment and knows who to tap and for what.

A multidisciplinary committee can be an effective tool to develop and plan the implementation of a new initiative. Using the previous example, the expertise required to implement an automated UR program far exceeds the expertise and control of the health care administrator. A multidisciplinary committee brings the necessary expertise to the table, creates an opportunity to gain support from others, and ensures all situations are thoroughly addressed during planning, development and deployment. Goleman describes the importance of collaboration and team performance: "When teams operate at their best, the results can be more than simply additive — they can be multiplicative, with the best talents of one person catalyzing the best of another ... to produce results far beyond what any one person might have done. The explanation of this aspect of team performance lies in the members' relationships — in the chemistry between members."⁶

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The health care administrator's wise use of a multidisciplinary committee to implement the automated UR is quickly understood when one or more of the key players have agendas inconsistent with the initiative. The conflicting agenda is not necessarily purposefully undermining, but nonetheless can derail the program. Within the multidisciplinary committee, less cooperative individuals tend to modify their behavior, to include more listening and sharing. Peer review affects the group dynamics and, managed properly, provides opportunity for collaboration.

The emotionally intelligent health care administrator recognizes the value each player brings to the table. Despite the fact that everyone works for the same employer, each member is unique, has different experiences, education, backgrounds and agendas. The diversity of the group, when facilitated properly by the administrator, will strengthen the final product. Each perspective of the group should be expressed. The means and methods of the initiative will be molded as the perspectives influence the process. In the end, the initiative will be well crafted and have commitment from the players, resulting in a more successful implementation.

Conclusion

Daniel Goleman's landmark work with emotional intelligence suggests people are being judged by new standards for excellence in leadership. No longer are intelligence, training and expertise the primary determining factors

of successful administrators. How one handles himself or herself and others, and his or her emotional competence skills are the defining keys of success.

In the final analysis, success in correctional health care administration is all about relationships. In today's work environment, collaboration and teamwork are needed to replace the command and control, paramilitary-style leadership. Trust builds rapport and influence, and political awareness ensures all players have a stake in the success of the health care program. Emotional intelligence skills are essential to the successful health care administrator, more significant than technical skills alone. The emotionally intelligent health care administrator is adept in trustworthiness, politics and collaboration.

REFERENCES

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Julie W. Wands is the deputy assistant director of the health services division for the Federal Bureau of Prisons.