COMMENTARY

The Importance of Authentic Leadership to all Generations Represented within Academic Pharmacy

Nicole R. Pinelli, PharmD, MS,a Julie M. Sease, PharmD,b Kamala Nola, PharmD, MS,c Jeffrey A. Kyle, PharmD,d Seth D. Heldenbrand, PharmD,e Scott R. Penzak, PharmD,f Diane B. Ginsburg, PhD, MSg

a The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, UNC Eshelman School of Pharmacy, Chapel Hill, North Carolina
b Presbyterian College, School of Pharmacy, Clinton, South Carolina
c Lipscomb University, College of Pharmacy, Nashville, Tennessee
d Samford University, McWhorter School of Pharmacy, Birmingham, Alabama
e University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, College of Pharmacy, Little Rock, Arkansas
f University of North Texas Health Science Center, System College of Pharmacy, Fort Worth, Texas
g The University of Texas at Austin, College of Pharmacy, Austin, Texas

Submitted July 20, 2017; accepted December 28, 2017; published August 2018.

Academic pharmacy spans several generations including traditionalists, baby boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y, commonly referred to as millennials. It has been suggested that leadership styles must change to accommodate these generational differences in academic pharmacy, yet there are no data of which we are aware, that support this assertion. We contend that leadership styles are derived from one’s authentic self and are based on core beliefs and values; therefore, leadership styles must not change to accommodate a specific generation or other subset of academic pharmacy. Instead, effective leaders must change tactics (ie, methods or processes) to reach and influence a specific cohort. This article develops and supports the argument that leadership styles should not change to accommodate generational differences in academic pharmacy.

Keywords: leadership, millennials, Generation Y, authenticity, pharmacy

INTRODUCTION

Much has been written of late about the unique values, behaviors, and opinions of Generation Y, or millennials (individuals born between 1982 and 1995), leading some members of the academy to question whether leadership styles must change to address members of this generation.1-5 This is a valid query, considering that as of 2014, 31% of pharmacy faculty in U.S. schools and colleges were ≤ 39 years, suggesting that a significant portion of these individuals are millennials (ie, born during or after 1982).6 However, the generation to which a person belongs is only one variable that may influence their characteristics, needs, and behaviors.7 Moreover, changing leadership styles to accommodate a specific generation may be perceived as inauthentic, which can undermine the effectiveness of a leader.8 Further, we are unaware of any primary data that indicate that leadership styles must change to accommodate generational differences in academic pharmacy. The commentary herein is based upon an Academic Fellows Leadership Program (AFLP) debate that took place in February 2017 at the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP) Interim Meeting in Rio Mar, Puerto Rico.

METHODS

The original debate topic of whether leadership styles must change to accommodate generational differences in academic pharmacy was discussed and developed in September 2016. Six team members reviewed the literature to identify pertinent references. Keywords included leadership style, leadership tactics, millennials, Generation Y, and authentic leadership. The literature search was completed in November 2016. Resources searched included PubMed, Google Scholar, the Harvard Business Review, and applicable books. References from selected articles were used to identify additional resources.

More than 75 sources were identified and used to develop discussion material. Content was developed and refined over 4-6 weeks to determine final arguments, which were presented in debate format.
Throughout the literature, leadership styles have been described, defined, and classified in many ways. In 1939, Kurt Lewin described leaders using three main behavioral traits: autocratic, democratic, and laissez faire. The autocratic leader is adept at making important decisions when needed, but they tend to forego asking their team’s opinions, which may be detrimental to the organization. The democratic leader, on the other hand, depends on the opinions of the team; however, when a multitude of opinions exists, this leader may find it difficult to arrive at any decision at all. Finally, the laissez faire leader is one who, rather than make any decision, waits for decisions to be made by team members instead.

In the 1960s, Robert Blake and Jane Mouton produced their managerial grid to describe a leader’s motivation as being either more “people-centered” or more “results centric.” Leadership styles move within this framework from impoverished management (low concern for results and low concern for people) to produce-or-perish (high concern for results and low concern for people) to accommodate (low concern for results and high concern for people), to the most desired style, team management (high concern for both people and results). Flamholtz and Randle described leadership using a matrix. The purpose of their matrix was to help a leader decide which style would be most appropriate for their organization. Highly motivated and skilled team members are likely to desire more autonomy, while those with less motivation and skills are likely to require more direct oversight. Likewise, tasks that can be described and performed in a step-wise manner are more likely to be performed with less oversight. Conversely, tasks that are more ambiguous are likely to require the leader to be more participative. In both of these matrices, leadership styles are based on the job at hand and the individual or individuals being led, not on overarching assumptions such as generational characteristics.

Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee identified six emotional leadership styles in their 2002 book, Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence. The visionary leader is one who inspires others to use their own initiative. The coach leader helps members connect their personal goals and values with those of their organization. The affiliate leader facilitates inclusiveness and resolution of conflicts among team members. The democratic leader, similar to Lewin’s democratic leader, focuses on collaboration and seeks others’ input on decisions before moving forward. The pacesetter leader expects excellence, sets high standards, and provides assistance to ensure goals are met. Lastly, the commander leader, similar to Lewin’s autocratic leader, makes decisions and exerts control as a fundamental aspect of their leadership.

In 2001, in his book Good to Great, Jim Collins categorized leadership into five levels. He described each level using leadership traits, indicating that most leaders are able to reach the fourth level, but have difficulty progressing to the fifth. Those levels are: Highly Capable Individual: the leader has talent, knowledge, skills and good work habits; Contributing Team Member: the leader makes contributions and works effectively with others to achieve goals; Competent Manager: the leader organizes people and resources to meet goals; Effective Leader: the leader moves their team toward a compelling vision and stimulates high performance among team members; and Executive: the leader is simultaneously humble and professional, and builds enduring greatness for their organization.

Both Goleman and colleagues, and Collins describe leaders and leadership traits on the basis of one-to-one relationships between a leader and a follower that are not based solely on the birth year (i.e., generational descriptor) of the follower.

Andrew Dubrin, Professor Emeritus at the Rochester Institute of Technology, defines leadership style as a consistent pattern of behavior displayed by a leader over time. An individual’s leadership style is based on a combination of their beliefs, values and preferences. Dr. William Cohen, a retired USAF general and founder of the Institute of Leader Arts, notes that it is a major error for a leader to pretend to be something he or she is not. As such, leaders should not change their beliefs or personality; instead, leaders should adapt their approach by using different tactics, depending on the situation at hand. Tactics can be defined as a set of skills, methods, or processes used by a leader to influence or motivate others to accomplish goals, regardless of the leader’s style or the situation at hand. Leaders may employ a multitude of tactics; however, Cohen identified and described eight commonly used leadership tactics, which are frequently noted by scholars when addressing this topic: direction, persuasion, negotiation, involvement, indirection, enlistment, redirection, and repudiation.

Other descriptors for leadership style that have been used include bureaucratic, charismatic, servant, transactional and transformational. Transformational leadership, considered by many to be the most effective leadership style, combines many of the aforementioned traits to create one seemingly perfect leader. Five qualities of a transformational leader according to Georgetown University’s Institute for Transformational Leadership include self-awareness, ability to collaborate, understanding of interdependence, humility, and authenticity. The importance of authenticity to effective leadership and the juxtaposition of attempting to change one’s leadership style to fit a particular generation, is discussed below.
Authentic leadership is critical to the success of the academy, including individual members and the leaders themselves. Because authentic leaders draw upon their experiences to drive their actions and make decisions, it is not possible for an authentic leader to bend to the whims of an individual cohort, such as millennials. Instead, authentic leaders lead from their own unwavering values and beliefs, which are based on experience. Authentic leaders have been shown to be more effective than non-authentic leaders and authentic leadership has resulted in positive organizational outcomes.\textsuperscript{18} Therefore, leaders within the academy must work to achieve and maintain authenticity. Authentic leaders create an organizational climate of commitment, knowledge-sharing, job satisfaction, greater work engagement, higher performance, and productivity.\textsuperscript{19} Moreover, in stakeholder reports, authentic leadership resulted in employees who feel inspired and passionate about the work of their organization.\textsuperscript{20}

Another advantage of authentic leaders is that they are superior to non-authentic leaders during periods of organizational turbulence or change.\textsuperscript{21} This is because authentic leaders are aware of their own emotions, cognitions, beliefs and motives.\textsuperscript{19} Because of their self-awareness, authentic leaders are able to control for their personal biases; this allows them to maintain accuracy and objectivity when responding to both positive and negative information. Ultimately, these leaders draw upon their personal experiences and convictions to make decisions and process information in an unbiased manner; thereby allowing them to maintain open and honest relationships with those whom they lead.\textsuperscript{19,22} Because authentic leaders base their actions on their values, they are characterized as having high integrity and transparency. To this end, the transparency and integrity of an authentic leader are stabilizing forces during times of tumult because followers feel a sense of security with the actions and motives of their leader.

Further, authentic leaders are superior to non-authentic leaders because they can influence their followers’ feelings of identification with the leader and the organization. Their positive influence develops associates into future leaders in their organization. Authentic leaders are more likely to have positive relationships with their followers, leading to greater value congruence and follower reciprocation that is consistent with the authentic leader’s own values.\textsuperscript{23} Because authentic leaders are true to themselves, they exhibit behaviors that positively transform associates into authentic leaders.\textsuperscript{24}

Further, an authentic leader is one who exemplifies a high level of energy, resolve, and persistence.\textsuperscript{22} These characteristics are crucial in allowing the leader to overcome resistance, deal with frustration and setbacks, make personal sacrifices, recruit support, and energize others especially if overseeing organizational changes.\textsuperscript{22} Moreover, to find the inner strength, motivation, and energy required to persist in the face of obstacles, effective leaders must operate from strong convictions.\textsuperscript{22} Given the importance of authenticity to effective and transformational leadership, we assert that the effective leader chooses various tactics or traits to lead specific followers in specific situations; they do not alter their leadership style to accommodate the generational descriptor of those whom they lead.

There are currently no data that support the need to adopt a particular leadership style to accommodate any one generation. The majority of evidence consists of survey data describing how generations differed at the same point in time in life, on average, with relation to values, attitudes, beliefs, or motivations; educational development; and personality characteristics.\textsuperscript{3,5,25-27} When compared to baby boomers at the same age, data suggest that millennials and Generation X considers goals related to extrinsic values (eg, financial potential, image, fame) to be more important.\textsuperscript{3,5} Additionally, millennials and Generation X have demonstrated slightly lower concern for others (eg, empathy) and less interest in civic orientation compared to baby boomers.\textsuperscript{5} Other areas of generational differences identified include higher self-esteem and positive self-views and changes in sexual frequency or political party identification patterns over time.\textsuperscript{25-27}

While these data suggest that generations vary, each person in the academy is a unique individual with multiple socio-cultural factors beyond generation that can influence his/her needs for recruitment, motivation and retention. Currently, additional pharmacy-specific data are needed to identify what generational differences, if any, exist among members of the academy. The 2017 AACP national faculty survey collected demographic characteristics of the institution (eg, private vs public) and of individual survey respondents (eg, administrative/faculty rank, tenure status, teaching location).\textsuperscript{28} This survey also summarized faculty perceptions regarding administration/governance, faculty development/performance, infrastructure, curriculum/teaching/assessment, developing/supervising students, and academic role as an aggregate of the academy and by institution type only.\textsuperscript{28} Faculty perceptions have not been summarized by generation. Until such data are available, it is not possible for leaders to determine whether targeted tactic(s) are needed to address putative generational differences across the academy.

**CONCLUSION**

An individual’s leadership style is a set of observable qualities derived from their core beliefs, values and decision-making over time. Authentic leaders have been shown to attract, motivate, and maintain followers more effectively than their inauthentic counterparts. Moreover, changing leadership styles to engage a particular generation...
of followers in the Academy alienates the remaining generations not targeted by this change in leadership style. Further, generational stereotypes applied to birth-cohorts over time do not account for other variables — besides one’s generation — that can influence behavior. Followers are attracted to leaders at the level of the individual, not the generational level. Therefore, changing one’s leadership style compromises authenticity and requires moving away from one’s core beliefs, values and previous decision-making rationale. Perhaps most importantly, we are unaware of any data from academic pharmacy that suggest that a change in leadership style provides measurable benefits to those who are being led. We strongly encourage AACP to collect these data in the future. Until such data are available, we maintain that leadership styles must not change to accommodate generational differences in academic pharmacy; instead, leaders are encouraged to maximize their use of tactics when leading a diverse group of followers.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to acknowledge the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy for providing the Academic Fellows Program and giving us the opportunity to participate in the Fellow Debates at the 2017 AACP Interim Meeting in Rio Grande, Puerto Rico. We would also like to acknowledge Jonathan A. Wolfson for his expert guidance on the debate process, Cohort 5 for a thoughtful and spirited debate on leadership, our individual dean mentors, and Paul Gubbins for their thoughtful input during our debate preparation.

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