

Empowering Tomorrow's Female Leaders:

Unveiling the Core Ingredients for Fostering Women's Pathways to Leadership

This white paper has been authored by the National Association for Home Care & Hospice Home Health Financial Management Association (HHFMA) Women in Home Health and Hospice Leadership Committee (WHHLC) Subcommittee. The Subcommittee comprises Bernadette Smith, Hannah Patterson, Pamela Morgan, and Kassie Hodge.

Executive Summary

The mission of HHFMA's Women in Home Health and Hospice Leadership Committee (WHHLC) is to empower professional, energetic, and passionate female HHFMA members advocating for home health and hospice to elevate to leadership roles within HHFMA and the industry at large. The WHHLC will serve as a catalyst to promote women in home care and hospice financial management through networking, education, and leadership opportunities within HHFMA. WHHLC will support HHFMA efforts to be a change maker within the home health and hospice field with the objective to connect women to not just other female leaders but all leadership within HHFMA, empower more female leadership throughout the HHFMA, and inspire women by bringing together a diverse mix of home health and hospice leaders nationwide. This committee was tasked with developing a culture where women are encouraged to seek leadership career paths. In furtherance of that call to action, this white paper is focused on defining the core ingredients to encourage women to seek leadership positions.

Introduction

“For every 100 men promoted from entry-level to manager, only 87 women are promoted, and only 82 women of color are promoted. As a result, men significantly outnumber women at the manager level, and women can never catch up with the

manager level. There are simply too few women to promote into senior leadership positions.” (leanin.org, 2022. Women in the Workplace) Women have a much higher representation across the US healthcare industry than in most other industries, but there is still much to do to gain equal leadership representation. In 2021, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that women represented over 77% of employment in the health industry, but held only 46% and 32% of vice president and c-suite level roles, respectively. This committee acknowledges the vast amount of improvement to be made in this space and has developed insights around the key ingredients that will help women continue to advance in the industry. With these four core ingredients, the subcommittee will create education around an agency-level policy that can be adapted to help further the reach of women to the betterment of the entire industry. This committee is tasked with focusing on women in leadership, but we believe that the more fully and equally *all* voices are heard and represented, the better the patient voices of corresponding genders and ethnicities will be heard and represented, and the better individual patient care will be delivered.

Background

Within the Women in Leadership (WIL) committee, a dedicated subcommittee has been formed with the specific topic of crafting materials aimed at fostering a culture that actively promotes women's pursuit of leadership career paths. This white paper is a direct response to that imperative, honing in on the essential components to inspire and support women in their journey toward leadership roles. By identifying and defining these core ingredients, our objective is to contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding the encouragement of women to embark on and excel within leadership positions.

- Industry Student
- Work/Life Balance
- Personal Branding
- Career Progression

Recommendations

The team researched the following four core ingredients that, when nourished and allowed to flourish with encouragement from other women leaders ahead of them on the “ladder,” will encourage women who might not otherwise do so, to seek leadership positions. We recommend that women currently in leadership roles at their post-acute organizations think deeply about how they could adapt these ingredients as part of their organizational culture and their own interactions to encourage women in their organizations to climb the ladder. We hope, too, that they will make use of the forthcoming policy recommendations and educational materials that this committee will submit before our group time expires.

Industry Student: The Imperative of Education

The healthcare industry plays a vital role in society. Effective leadership within this sector is essential for delivering high-quality care and addressing healthcare challenges that can be quite complex. Despite women constituting a significant portion of the healthcare workforce, they remain underrepresented in leadership positions. Education is a key driver in empowering women to overcome the barriers they face and actively participate in healthcare leadership roles.

I. Education as an Empowerment Tool

Education plays a pivotal role in empowering women to pursue leadership roles in healthcare. By providing women with access to comprehensive educational programs, organizations can equip them with the necessary skills, knowledge, and confidence to navigate various healthcare domains effectively. Leadership development programs and education tailored to the specific needs of women can address gender-related challenges and enhance their leadership potential.

II. Strategies for Promoting Education for Women in Healthcare Leadership

To promote education for women in healthcare leadership, various strategies can be implemented:

- A. Establish mentorship and sponsorship programs to provide guidance and support for aspiring and even current women leaders
- B. Develop leadership training programs that integrate gender-specific challenges and foster the acquisition of leadership competencies
- C. Create networking opportunities to enable women in healthcare to connect, share experiences, and build professional relationships.
- D. Encourage organizations to adopt gender-inclusive policies that support work-life balance, flexible scheduling, and maternity/family leaves
- E. Advocate for gender diversity and inclusion at all levels of the healthcare system, including boardrooms and executive positions.

Education is a catalyst for empowering women in healthcare leadership and addressing gender imbalance. By investing in women's education and removing barriers to their advancement, we can unlock the full potential of talented women leaders, improve healthcare outcomes, and foster a more equitable and inclusive healthcare system. Embracing diversity and providing equal opportunities for women in healthcare leadership is not only the right thing to do but also crucial for driving positive change in the healthcare system.

Work/Life Balance

Work/Life balance...What exactly does that mean? Alison Begor, a work-life balance coach, in her book titled "Work-Life In Balance," says that Cambridge defines work-life balance as "the amount of time you spend doing your job compared with the amount of time you spend with your family and doing things you enjoy."

Of course, technically, that is what work/life balance is. The real question is, what does it mean to you? Everyone is going to have a different definition and different needs. The most important factor is that whatever you choose to do works for your lifestyle.

Whether a woman chooses a full-time career or one part-time, with support at the company level, there is a way for everybody. If someone chose to stay home with small children, they could, for example, conceivably still work part-time to maintain and enhance their skillset to be more prepared to re-enter the full-time workforce. There are many other strategies. Lean In's Women in the Workplace study says, "a vast majority of women prefer remote or hybrid work to being fully on-site – and this option preference is about more flexibility."

Women@Work: A Global Outlook 2023 states that “results show that an organization’s ability or (inability) to offer women flexibility around when their work gets done is a top lever of engagement and retention – even more than where they work.” Women in leadership positions can support other women by showing support for or championing scheduling flexibility, including changes that may better fit a more balanced lifestyle for caregivers, for example.

Alison Begor’s book provides 15 strategies for creating work-life balance. These include suggestions for time management, self-care, boundaries, and much more. The book is a very easy read and has sections to write down ideas and strategies.

The Public Health Emergency (PHE) offered leaders the opportunity to come up with creative methods of doing business. Now that the PHE is over, our women leaders are responsible for ensuring these opportunities continue. Jaime Grant, in her book titled “Leadership for Women,” states that work/life balance laws have been enacted in 25 countries, including some states in the US.

This is the time for women leaders to stand up and fight for the right to be a great leader and have a fulfilling life too!

Personal Branding

One powerful tool that can be harnessed to empower women in their journey to leadership is the concept of personal branding. Personal branding enables women to showcase their unique skills, experiences, and values, breaking through barriers and stereotypes. When women leaders embrace and cultivate a woman's personal brand, they help encourage her to seek leadership positions, emphasizing the importance of self-awareness, visibility, networking, and authenticity. This forceful quote about personal branding serves as a reminder for women leaders as they encourage others to climb the ranks: “ You *can* be whatever you want to be, and you *can* do whatever you want to do. But you will need to learn how to use the voice inside you to sell your way

into the life you want.”(L.Ferek) As leaders, we can help other women find their voice and support them as they learn to use it.

I. Building Self-Awareness

The foundation of personal branding lies in self-awareness. Encouraging women to reflect on their strengths, values, and aspirations is a crucial first step in fostering leadership ambition. By understanding themselves better, women can articulate their goals and leadership potential more effectively. This self-awareness helps women overcome self-doubt and reinforces the belief that they have what it takes to succeed in leadership roles. Personal branding encourages women to embrace their unique qualities and recognize that diversity in leadership enriches organizations by bringing different perspectives to the table.

II. Breaking Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes have long constrained women from pursuing leadership positions. Personal branding enables women to challenge these stereotypes by showcasing their unique expertise and achievements. When women consistently communicate their capabilities and accomplishments, it disrupts traditional gender roles and biases that have held them back. Additionally, breaking cultural stereotypes as they pertain to women is equally important. Women in leadership positions can inspire other women simply by being confident and competent leaders: by virtue of leading by example and empowering those on lower ladder rungs to push through societal constraints and seek their own leadership positions.

III. Enhancing Visibility

In the modern age of social media and digital communication, personal branding is a powerful tool for increasing visibility. Women can use various platforms to share their experiences, knowledge, and insights, reaching a wider audience. This increased visibility not only opens up opportunities for mentorship and collaboration but also demonstrates to others that women are present and active in leadership spheres. By

being visible, women can become role models, inspiring others to follow in their footsteps and aspire to leadership roles.

IV. Network Building

Building a personal brand involves connecting with peers, mentors, and supporters who can help women on their leadership journey. These connections create a support system that offers guidance, advice, and encouragement. Networking also provides opportunities to learn from others who have successfully navigated their way into leadership positions. As leaders, women can support other women by extending their network to include others. As women build their personal brand and further extend their networks, they can leverage these networks to gain valuable insights and access to leadership positions that might otherwise have been out of reach. NAHC HHFMA Women In Leadership is one such invaluable network-building tool, where like-minded women can network and develop a core network of leaders within our industry.

V. Authenticity

Authenticity is the cornerstone of a compelling personal brand, as it fosters trust, connection, and resonance with one's audience. In a world saturated with carefully curated images and personas, genuine authenticity stands out as a beacon of sincerity and integrity. When women leaders create a space for other women to be their true selves and openly share their own - and accept others' - values, passions, and vulnerabilities, they create opportunities for learning, connection, and growth. This transparency builds trust and engenders a sense of loyalty and a genuine connection. In the age of social media and digital communication, an authentic personal brand is a powerful tool that can distinguish women as individuals, foster meaningful relationships, and ultimately help them achieve their professional and personal goals.

V. Confidence and Empowerment

Personal branding, truly owning who you are, serves as a source of empowerment, boosting women's confidence in their leadership capabilities. As women see the positive impact of their personal branding efforts, they gain the self-assurance needed to pursue

leadership roles. It is beholden on all of us to encourage and foster a sense of belonging, making women feel they are a valuable part of the leadership landscape. This confidence, in turn, contributes to a more diverse and inclusive leadership pool, which benefits organizations and society as a whole.

By fostering self-awareness, breaking stereotypes, enhancing visibility, building networks, and instilling confidence, personal branding empowers women to seek and excel in leadership roles. As women embrace their unique qualities and communicate their strengths, they inspire others and contribute to a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive leadership landscape. Personal branding is not just about promoting oneself but about creating a more inclusive world where women's leadership is celebrated and encouraged. As we continue to champion women's empowerment, personal branding emerges as a formidable ally in the quest for gender equality in leadership.

Career Progression

Career Progression means something different to each one of us. We all have our own personal and societal contributions of how we are where we are today. When we look at our own careers, there often isn't a direct path to ensure you're headed in the right direction until you focus on what truly inspires you to continue growing, developing & feeling success. Oftentimes, we look at a leader we admire and strive to be that person. Don't forget that their path may not be the right one for us.

No matter what level position you are in today, individual contributor, team lead, manager, executive, or owner, be good at what you're doing & focus on what you need to get to the next level, if it's something you desire. Women leaders across the corporate world, non-profit sector, start-up agencies/companies, for-profit, etc., leaders focus on lifting one another up & ensuring they are growing their own personal brand & mission. Find those women for you, network & build your own network of support. These women can become the backbone of some challenging times you never know you'd need to achieve the next level. Believe in them.

One of the best pieces of advice one can receive early in their career is to always say yes when presented with an opportunity, extra task, or small project. It's common to feel unprepared for the next role accepted. However, confidence in the leaders who endorse the transition is crucial, along with a determination not to disappoint them. Building confidence in one's ability to grow into the role, demonstrating capability to doubters, fostering a supportive team, and achieving the next step are essential. Succumbing to imposter syndrome and doubting one's achievements can hinder career progression. Progress requires an effort to succeed. It's unlikely that any leader assumes a leadership role expecting to fail without trying.

Leadership can look different at every step in your career. Seek out mentors at every phase. Just because someone was your mentor and/or sponsor in one chapter of your career, doesn't mean they are a great match to the next opportunity you take. Ensure you can focus on overcoming challenges or obstacles to advance your growth mindset. Build your own internal toolset you're able to carry forward in your next career adventure. The best words I tell those around me is fail forward. Hopefully you're not making the same mistakes twice in your career but learn from those mistakes or decisions that didn't result in the desired outcome you were hoping for.

Leadership doesn't mean you always have the answers. Play to your strengths, align your time to what your role needs, continue learning people/processes/technology, join industry associations to network, and keep a journal of the kudos you've gotten along the way to remind yourself of how great of a leader you are. (The higher you go in your career, the less & less this gets shared with you – YOU are where you are because you got yourself there, with the help of others, of course). Having a growth mindset and being flexible with the ever-changing landscape of a professional requires hard work.

Invest in your relationships to support your career decisions, continue being an empathetic, relatable leader, and be resilient. Growing in your career isn't easy, but you can have fun along the way. You'll gain a network of cheerleaders who can inspire your continuous improvement of being a better you. If you're interested in doing something different, make sure you're communicating this clearly. Oftentimes, your manager or

other leaders within your own company may not know this. Tell them, verbally and maybe in writing. Schedule a 1:1 meeting and communicate you want to be considered. Make it known that you're ready to take on the next adventure. Develop a plan of how you will achieve it. The worst thing that can happen is they say no. Ask why and what you need to close the gap in your skills, and try again. Go crush your goals! The rest of us will be here championing you along the way.

Conclusion

The insights provided by the Women in Leadership (WIL) subcommittee underscore the critical need to empower and nurture women in healthcare leadership. Our examination of personal branding, education, work/life balance, and career progression as fundamental ingredients for fostering women's pathways to leadership reveals actionable strategies and indispensable considerations.

The concept of personal branding emerged as a powerful tool, enabling women to showcase their unique abilities and challenge stereotypes. By fostering self-awareness, breaking barriers, enhancing visibility, building networks, and embracing authenticity, women leaders pave the way for a more diverse and inclusive leadership landscape.

Education emerged as a catalyst, offering women the tools, knowledge, and confidence to navigate complex healthcare domains. Establishing mentorship programs, developing gender-inclusive policies, and advocating for diversity at all levels emerge as imperative strategies to promote women's leadership roles.

Work/life balance, a term resonating differently for each individual, underlines the need for flexibility and creative methods in today's professional landscape. Our findings

emphasize the significance of accommodating diverse needs, whether through remote work options, flexible scheduling, or advocating for work/life balance laws.

Career progression, an ever-evolving journey, thrives on support networks, seizing opportunities, and cultivating a growth mindset. Encouraging women to say 'yes' to opportunities, seek mentors, communicate aspirations, and continually learn and adapt are pivotal elements in advancing their careers.

As this white paper concludes, it's clear that investing in women's leadership isn't just a matter of equity; it's a strategic imperative for the healthcare industry's success and for driving change across the industry. By implementing the strategies outlined herein and leveraging the core ingredients identified, organizations can pave the way for more equitable, diverse, and effective leadership. Each woman empowered to rise to leadership isn't just a step forward for gender parity; it's a leap toward a more compassionate, innovative, and inclusive healthcare landscape.

Resources

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MGI Worldwide | Women Who Lead Group Initiatives Empower Female Talents (and help our Male Colleagues too!) to Lead – Inspire – Succeed.

<https://www.mgiworld.com/resource/women-who-lead-group-initiatives-empower-female-talents-in-the-accounting-profession-to-lead-inspire-succeed.html>