Orit Ramler Szulik, a professional leadership coach based in Durham, N.C., collaborated with us in answering commonly asked questions about leadership coaching.

What’s the purpose of a leadership coach in a medical practice setting?
A coach helps a physician leader set clear goals, develop strategies and take action in order to become successful, more efficient and gain a personal and professional sense of fulfillment.

Who can benefit from leadership coaching?
Contrary to what some people think, leadership coaching is not directed toward those who are on the verge of failure. It also is not an opportunity to pass the buck for responsibility to someone else. Rather, it is directed toward those who choose to succeed and want to excel in their leadership roles. Both experienced and newer physicians can benefit.

What benefits can leadership coaching bring to a physician?
Coaching offers a “safe” space for developing important professional strengths.
- Development of a personal managerial and leadership style and skills by:
  - Venting and reinventing
  - Recognizing and transforming blind spots and ineffective habits
- Gaining focus, direction and commitment
- Planning, thinking and strategizing
- Learning to work and lead with vision rather than by dealing only with day-to-day issues
- Acquiring best practices for time management and life balance
- Improving performance toward measurable goals
- Addressing and resolving challenges and problems
- Honing communication skills by:
  - Improving interpersonal communication
  - Developing comfort and ability to engage in “difficult” conversations
  - Mastering the art of asking
  - Learning how to say “no” and “yes”
  - Learning to negotiate respectfully and effectively
  - Enhancing team performance, collaboration and spirit
- Growing your vision by:
  - Thinking “outside the box”
  - Identifying and promoting your unique abilities and services offered
  - Obtaining greater visibility and increasing impact
  - Taking a new approach to solving an old problem
- Energizing people within and outside your practice by:
  - Managing relationships and change
- Improving decision-making
  - Creating frameworks for managing burnout, stress, emotions and expectations
  - Facilitating an enjoyable and more productive work environment
  - Performing at your best in the middle of the storm

How can I find a leadership coach who is right for me?
We have four suggestions for finding a leadership coach:
1. Start with your own needs, identifying the ways in which you and/or your organization would like to improve both performance and satisfaction. Then decide what approach and which coach are best for you?
2. Determine the time and effort you are willing to devote to coaching. You can certainly find a coach who will help you remotely. But nothing beats on-site, one-on-one personal attention.

3. Ask colleagues and professional societies whom they recommend.

4. Use the Internet to explore the different options. Some coaches specialize in helping physicians only. Others work with professionals in many fields, including, but not limited to medicine.

How does a leadership coach work with clients?

Coaching adapts to individual needs, so there's no set formula for the methodology. It's meant to make the client's plate lighter, not fuller.

The frequency of the coaching varies according to need. At the start, the coach meets with the client every week or every other week. Generally there are more coaching sessions at the beginning and fewer as the process unfolds. Some clients choose to work long term with a coach in order to preserve that safe space for thinking and planning.

Each meeting or conversation has a clear goal. During each session, coaches may coach, consult, mentor, train and/or facilitate as needed. At the end of each session, the client and coach agree on a step or assignment (e.g., something to do, read and/or accomplish) for professional growth.

The client’s progress in-between the coaching conversations is as important and sometimes more relevant than what happens during the session. Between meetings, the coach is usually available for short consultations in order to provide support or discuss issues that arise. Some coaches shadow their clients or plan retreats with them and their teams.

How do leadership coaches package and price their services?

Services may be offered as a set package at a fixed price. For example, the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) in Greensboro, N.C., (www.ccl.org/leadership/coaching/individual.aspx?pageid=202) offers three individual coaching opportunities that can be used alone or integrated with another program.

Other leadership coaches customize a package of services to individual physician need (e.g., content, length of time, price) and charge an hourly fee. Still another option is to participate in the leadership development programs of such organizations as the North Carolina Medical Society or the American Association of Physician Leadership (formerly the American College of Physician Executives).

Where can I learn more about leadership coaching and how it might help me?

If you are interested in formal leadership coaching, check out the following resources:

- Satinsky Consulting L.L.C. (www.satinskyconsulting.com)
- Make It a Good One (makeitagoodone.com), (http://www.makeitagoodone.com)
- American Association of Physician Leadership (www.physicianleaders.org)
- North Carolina Medical Society Leadership College Program (www.ncmedsoc.org)

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