

Learning to Lead - A CTO Leadership Onboarding Program

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1. Background

In academic clinical research, staff are frequently promoted to leaders based on their subject matter expertise and individual contributor success. Despite championing internal promotions, there is little leadership training to aid with their transition. The Clinical Trials Office (CTO) at the University of North Carolina Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center (LCCC) frequently promotes internal talent (80 percent of leadership hires within the last 10 years). Yet, LCCC lacked a leadership onboarding program, relying on managers to learn on the job with informal guidance from seasoned peers.

2. Goals

The short-term goals of this project were to develop a comprehensive and engaging leadership onboarding program to provide new and seasoned leaders with tools, vocabulary, resources, and skills to effectively support their teams. As good management of staff is often associated with reduced rates of turnover, the long-term goals of this project include increasing both staff retention and satisfaction.

3. Solutions and Methods

A 20-week leadership onboarding program was developed consisting of asynchronous learnings and weekly 1-hour virtual discussion groups. Covered topics range from daring to lead to having a greater impact, incorporating leadership guidance from experts (e.g., Brené Brown to Liz Wiseman, respectively). Each week leaders watch 1-2 hours of YouTube recordings (median individual recording length: 9 minutes, range: 1-80 minutes). These recordings are complimented by handouts, tools, and online leadership skill assessments. LCCC-specific learnings are sprinkled throughout the sessions (e.g., vaults of CTO job descriptions, key LCCC Cancer Center Support Grant (CCSG) documents, and LCCC recordings on the center's history). The asynchronous model was selected due to its sustainability in an office where multiple leaders infrequently join simultaneously. To preserve the benefits of cohort-based learning, each week leaders reflected on their learnings within a CTO-wide workbook. As new leaders join LCCC, their peer's reflections are reviewed as they add their own thoughts to this living document. Each new leader is assigned a buddy to lead their weekly discussion group. When multiple leaders start simultaneously, larger discussion groups are formed.

4. Outcomes

Twenty-four CTO leaders have completed the onboarding program with three additional leaders enrolled. Current CTO leaders were included in an initial joint discussion group. All leaders provided positive feedback on the program. Seasoned leaders reported enjoying their participation, indicating the program created space for their professional development, provided them with the vocabulary to describe their current expertise, and taught them many new concepts/skills. New leaders reported that they developed foundational skills because of participation. >80 percent of leaders named the leadership onboarding program as a top 2023 CTO success.

5. Lessons Learned and Future Directions

Feedback noted that the course lacked education on the day-to-day workings of CTO leaders within each functional group and that leaders had a strong desire to learn more about their peers. Adjustments will be made to the program to address this gap. Two unexpected outcomes of the course were: 1) the

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connection the program created between leaders within different functional groups creating a desire for regular continued connection points through professional development activities, and 2) the ties the program created to LCCC's mission through education on LCCC's history and the CCSG.