



Low Carb Leadership



Here's a more effective way to lead your team and cultivate positive office communications.

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Tips from the Trenches is an every-issue column featuring practice management issues, and is written exclusively for PM by members of the Institute for Podiatric Excellence and Development (IPED). IPED's mission is to motivate, inspire, and synergistically bridge the gap between students, residents, new practitioners, and seasoned veterans in the field of podiatric medicine. They are committed to the idea that mentors with passion to share and mentees eager to learn make a powerful combination that allows IPED to bring and renew a full life to podiatric physicians, their practices, and their well-being throughout the U.S. and beyond. Visit www.podiatricexcellence.org.

Monday morning you walk into your office and start to review the chart for your first patient. You notice that the x-ray images have been taken improperly and you are not able to visualize the posterior calcaneus. This is not the first time this has happened. It has become a common problem in your practice, and one particular medical assistant (MA) is responsible.

Immediately you plan to set up a private meeting between the MA, office manager, and yourself. You start to think of two compliments to give your MA during your meeting, so you can employ the "Sandwich Method" for providing constructive criticism.

You set up the meeting. Immediately, you can sense that your MA is defensive—arms crossed, lips pursed,

with very little eye contact. He/she knows what is about to happen and has come to expect it. *What can you do, to make this conversation more effective and more pleasant?*

Some aspects of leadership have become extremely predictable and thus less effective. Sure, sticking to the "tried and true" approaches to inspire and manage your team has its merit. "If it's not broke, don't fix it", right? What if it is broken but no one knows it? Then I say, "fix it!"

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can do something even better. So, we won't call it fixing a problem. Instead, let's consider it *improving* a system to make it more effective and productive. That sounds better already!

You might be thinking to yourself, if it is so well-documented, then why would we want to change it? Here are two reasons:

1) Your team can recognize it from a mile away. Because the SM is so well known, its goal of lessening the negative blow is not *as effective* as it was years ago. This knowledge

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ways to give constructive criticism, leaders utilize the "Sandwich Method" (SM) for communicating concerns and issues with their team members. This is a well-documented method, where someone starts a conversation with a compliment, followed by a criticism, followed by another compliment; thus, putting the criticism in the middle of two compliments. The goal of presenting constructive criticism this way is to lessen the negative effect of the overall conversation, by highlighting what the listener is doing properly. We know that mitigating the negativity in an already difficult situation is always a great idea! However, we

can even lead to a jaded perspective from your group regarding any discussion on improvements needed or performance evaluations.

2) Though the well-earned compliments are appreciated and definitely desired, if your team hears them all the time *before* a criticism, then the compliment can lose some of its benevolence and inspirational impact. Think about it. Let's say you like ice cream. Each time you get an ice cream cone, you also get a terrible toothache, followed by another ice cream cone. If you know that the ice cream cone always precedes a painful

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toothache, will you really be able to enjoy the ice cream cone? It is in our nature as humans to crave recognition. There are countless psychological studies that prove this. Even the humblest of souls wants to know that, in some way, his/her work and efforts are being noticed. By using the traditional SM, you run the risk of leading your team members to think that their good work is only acknowledged in the face of their faults.

Team productivity and workplace experience is affected by whether or not team members feel valued, appreciated and noticed. That is why I have adopted my Low Carb Leadership (LCL) method. After years of working within different practices and seeing that the compliment-critique-compliment style was becoming less effective and actually hurting my communication with team members, I tried something different. The LCL method of constructive criticism has two main tenets.

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1) Provide in the moment positive reinforcement whenever possible (publically). There is no such thing as too much genuine praise and recognition of your team. This creates an environment of success and heightened expectations. It will also create a healthy competition for recognition within the team.

2) Provide in the moment constructive criticism when warranted (not publically, however). When #1 above is done, consistently, then there will be a foundation of positivity and appreciation that your team will grow accustomed to. Then, when any correction needs to be given, it will already have the buffer of positive reinforcements.

In the SM, compliments are calculated and derived from a need to give

correction. It is almost like having to ask your beau if they love you. Even when he/she says it, the impact is not the same, as when your beau says, "I love you" without being prompted.

A main source of carbohydrates is bread. This is why I use the term

Lay the groundwork first by being more liberal with recognizing the efforts, improvements, and jobs well done within your team. Then, gradually begin to interject, when needed, constructive criticism in the moment. There are circumstances where

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Low Carb Leadership. In the LCL method, I simply remove the distinct, calculated "bread" layers when giving constructive criticism.

The goal of the LCL method is to make constructive criticism and positive acknowledgement seamless in the workplace and create an environment where team members can come to expect honest, up-front feedback and instruction from their leaders... in real time. Team members have become so used to getting their kudos

it might be hard to provide genuine compliments to team members. When this is the case, implementing the LCL method of communication becomes harder. How can you create a positive foundation where your team member has a baseline of kudos to cushion any blow of constructive criticism, when performance is more often lacking than not? I do not advocate disingenuous communication. So, if there are performance issues that must be addressed, then do so. However, be sure to always provide action steps, tangible solutions to the concerns. Just detailing all the wrongs is not helpful.

In the face of problems, effective leadership and instruction entail dialogue on ways to improve. Leaders must first serve their team members. When addressing problems, they should also have solutions, or be open to discussing them. All too often, leaders identify problems, but leave it up to the team members to come up with solutions. It needs to be a joint effort.

So, the next time you find yourself providing constructive criticism, see if there is a way you can change the over-used narrative of the SM. Let's cut the carbs and communicate better by using Low Carb Leadership! **PM**

and criticisms in the same conversation that either the praise or the instruction being given is at risk of having little effect.

Even though avoiding the SM makes constructive criticism less of a monumental discussion, it should still be done in private and with intention of expressing areas where performance can be improved. An example would be, in the moment when correction is warranted, taking your team member to the side and having an honest talk; then returning to the daily tasks. Of course, there are times when the busy office setting will not always allow for real time correction, but real time correction and real time compliments should be the goal.

Change in your workplace communication is best done over time.



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