

## Insights

# Strategies for Effective Leadership in Health Improvement Efforts



Remember, the answers are almost always in the room.

Quality improvement efforts bring together a host of passionate and talented stakeholders, all seeking sustainable solutions for complex multi-layered problems. Because of their complexity, these initiatives require a leader who can seamlessly manage and motivate their team's efforts—someone who can inspire others and envision the future while not forgetting about the tasks that need to get done along the way.

Simply put, effective leadership can make or break a quality improvement effort. And that's a lot of pressure for any one individual. To help, we're sharing three key strategies on effective leadership from Gwen Webber-McLeod, president and CEO of Gwen Inc. and expert in leadership development. These strategies were originally introduced to support collaboration and communication in state teams on the NICHQ-led Collaborative Improvement and Innovation Network to Reduce Infant Mortality ([Infant Mortality CoIIN](#)). Keep reading to find out how to leverage those same tactics to drive change in your own improvement work.

Would you rather watch than read? [Check out the video series](#) and hear directly from Webber-McLeod on what it takes to be an effective leader.

### **Strategy One: Use Meetings to Support Open Communication**

Busy schedules and personal anxiety can get in the way of open communication, a prerequisite for [productive collaboration](#). Webber-McLeod recommends purposefully designing every team

meeting to encourage debate, which gives team members a designated time and place to share ideas and feedback. Use process questions to prompt thoughtful answers from your team instead of 'yes' or 'no' responses.

For example, consider asking:

- What are we not acknowledging about the strategy we've developed?
- What might be challenging that we aren't thinking of?
- What opportunities or impacts may we have that we have not already identified?

Similarly, ask for feedback about the structure of the meeting itself, not just the meeting's content. Have teams share what makes meetings successful and what makes them less effective. By discussing issues openly and working to resolve them, you'll show your team that you care about their input and inspire them to keep the lines of communication open.

### **Strategy Two: Manage Team Dysfunction**

Anyone in the improvement business knows that complex discussions and challenges can lead to group anxiety. And, according to Webber-McLeod, this is all too common in health improvement initiatives: "We're all so committed to doing the good work that we don't leave room to make a mistake."

When group stress takes over, effective leadership can mitigate momentary tension before it turns into destabilizing conflict. First, encourage your team to acknowledge what they're feeling and share their anxieties. Then, come together as a group to discuss strategies for moving forward and reenergizing your work. Have the courage to hit the reset button, if that is what it takes. Sometimes starting over is the first step to finding the best solution for your initiative.

And remember, says Webber-McLeod, the answers are almost always in the room. "If you, as the team lead, create multiple opportunities for the team to communicate with you—their questions, their concerns, their successes—your team will always find the answers."

### **Strategy Three: Practice Self Care and Sustainability**

Remember, leaders can't do their best work if they're too tired or stressed to think straight. The same goes for team members. Prioritizing self-care not only keeps you at the top of your game, it also sets an example for your team to emulate; if they see you practicing healthy habits, they'll be more likely to do the same, which translates to a more sustainable work environment.



Gwen Webber-McLeod, president and CEO of Gwen Inc.

Gain perspective by moving your thinking beyond your team and your project. Pay attention to rising talent—those who will be the next generation of health improvement leaders—and make a conscious effort to mentor them.

“The more we can grow and develop new generations of healthcare leaders,” says McLeod, “[those] who understand the impacts of

the improvement that you’re making, [and] have the philosophies, skills and behaviors to sustain it moving forward, the better for you...and the better for the children you will serve.”

*Interested in hearing more from Webber-McLeod? View her second video series, [5 Strategies for Engaging Extended Partners](#), and gain the skills you need to build an all-star improvement team.*

[Click here](#) to download Webber-McLeod's full bio.