

Respect & Dignity

Month 3 Leadership Practice

Purpose

This month's leadership practice invites you to explore how everyday expressions of respect and dignity influence belonging, professional growth, and team culture. Through intentional interactions, leaders can help create an environment where individuals feel valued, capable, and supported in their development.

Why This Matters

Research suggests that experiences of respect are closely associated with professional fulfillment, well-being, engagement, and organizational satisfaction. In healthcare settings, individuals who feel respected by their leaders report substantially lower rates of burnout and higher satisfaction than those who do not.

Respect and disrespect both influence workplace culture. Leadership behaviors often shape team norms, affecting how colleagues interact with one another, how learners are supported, and how teams function together.

Respect also functions as a catalyst for professional growth. When leaders consistently communicate that individuals are valued, capable, and deserving of respect, they help strengthen professional identity, confidence, and a sense of belonging. Over time, these signals can influence how people see themselves, their work, and their future within an organization.

Respect fosters psychological safety, and it is not a finite resource—it can be extended to every team member without diminishing what is available for others. When leaders embed respect into how they already lead, they create conditions where physicians and their teams can flourish.

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Rogers, K. (2018). Do your employees feel respected? *Harvard Business Review*, 96(4), 62–70.

Respect vs. Recognition

This month's leadership practice focuses on respect, which is distinct from recognition:

Respect signals worth and belonging—"you matter as a person here." It's ongoing and embedded in daily interactions. It shapes identity: "I belong."

Recognition typically acknowledges accomplishments, contributions, or progress—"you did something well." It's event-based and reinforces specific behaviors. It shapes motivation: "Do more of that."

CU Thrive Leadership Circles

This Month's Leadership Practice

Over the next several days, intentionally incorporate two visible expressions of respect into your everyday leadership interactions:

1. **One that communicates dignity, value, and belonging to all team members—**signaling that every person has inherent value and belongs, regardless of role.

Examples

- Acknowledge and greet all team members by name—physicians, APPs, nurses, techs, coordinators, and support staff alike.
- Listen fully without interruption—especially when someone lower in the hierarchy is speaking.
- Ask for input before giving direction. Signal that perspectives matter, not just compliance.
- Model civility and calm during high-acuity moments, when interpersonal climate is most easily strained.
- Minimize visible status differences—sit at the same table, use names not titles, make eye contact with everyone in the room.

2. **One that supports an individual's learning, confidence, or professional growth—**treating them as a capable professional in ways that support how they see themselves.

Examples

- Express confidence in someone's ability to handle an assignment—and give them room to try.
- Ask someone to teach or explain something to peers, signaling that their expertise is valued.
- Refer to someone's development trajectory—"You've grown a lot in this area"—so they see their own progress.
- Treat a trainee or junior colleague as a future peer, not just a learner to be corrected.
- When someone tries a new behavior or takes a risk, validate the attempt—help them move from "this feels odd" to "maybe this is really me."

Reflection Questions

After completing this month's leadership practice, reflect on the following:

1. Did you observe any changes in how people engaged, collaborated, or carried themselves?
2. What felt natural—and what felt less familiar?
3. Where might your leadership habits unintentionally signal disrespect—especially to those lower in the hierarchy?
4. Did you notice anyone growing or carrying themselves differently because of how you treated them?
5. How might your respect behaviors be influencing the team—peers, learners, or patients?
6. What is one respect behavior you will continue beyond this week?