# How to Be a Leader - Striking a Balance Between Technical and People Skills

November 15, 2021

**Julie McDowell:**

Leading a laboratory involves both technical knowledge and softer skills. Technical knowledge of testing and accreditation is needed along with the ability to manage people, perform risk assessment, and deal with finances and budgeting. Many pathologists leave training with the required technical knowledge, but sometimes lack training and confidence in the softer skills. The CAP's Laboratory Medical Direction course is led by experienced laboratory directors who can help correct gaps in your knowledge and improve your ability to function as a lab director. In this CAP Cast leading pathologists, Dr. Elizabeth Wagar and Dr. Richard Scanlan discuss the benefits of attending the course, which will be held March 31st through April 1st, 2022 in Chicago.

Let's start with talking about who should take the laboratory medical direction course. Dr. Scanlan, can we start with you?

**Dr. Richard Scanlan:**

Sure. Well, the course is open to all laboratory directors. We have found that those who are new in their roles or aspiring to lead are particularly interested in this course. I personally took the course when I abruptly became the lab medical director of a large and complex university hospital. I just didn't feel fully prepared to take on the responsibilities, and I took this course after taking it. I had a much better framework to lead teams working on difficult problems. I better understood how to evaluate new test proposals, work with difficult physicians, negotiate with administrative people for needed resources, and deal with situations where I had responsibilities without as much authority to institute change as I would've liked.

**Julie McDowell:**

And Dr. Wagar, what are your thoughts on this?

**Dr. Elizabeth Wagar:**

Well, I actually have found that many of our participants have negotiated the course into their contract when they accepted leadership roles and felt some inadequacies, similar to probably what I felt as well as Dr. Scanlan felt when taking on the laboratory director role. This particular course helped them to get quickly the training they needed, if for example, they're suddenly in a laboratory medical director role and help to lead their labs. And additionally, I have found that there are some very experienced lab directors who also show up just for the reassurance that they are on the right track and their experiences are correct and their responsibilities are similar.

**Julie McDowell:**

Dr. Wagar, can you talk a little bit about the highlights of the course?

**Dr. Elizabeth Wagar:**

Sure. Small group sessions on team building are key and process improvement, which has become a staple of life in all laboratories using very real life scenarios, provide a lot of experience to the pathologist in the small group arrangement. Small group sessions also are systemically analyze potential sources of problems that are leading to testing errors and making a business case for beginning a new test is also an important aspect of this course.

And then in addition, we add in a hot topic presentation on evolving challenges in laboratory medicine, changes in regulations, changes in the healthcare market that may influence what a laboratory director has to do and know. So I think that these are really important. And also sessions analyzing compliance and identifying pitfalls involving Medicare billing compliance are exceedingly important to the new person in a laboratory director role.

**Julie McDowell:**

Dr. Scanlan, I know you've conducted many inspections. Can you discuss how participating in this course help prepare pathologists for inspections of their facility?

**Dr. Richard Scanlan:**

One of the things we do in this course is to help the trainees identify common deficiencies that are present in many laboratories and teach them how to avoid them. One of the skills we teach is how to perform a self-inspection that's effective and preparing your laboratory for an upcoming CAP accreditation. We also teach how to respond to deficiencies and particularly also how to challenge deficiencies if you think your practices were compliant. We want you to become familiar with how to report problems to accrediting organizations and to deal with adverse events affecting laboratory accreditation such as suspended testing or probation.

**Julie McDowell:**

Now, this course blends several types of learning, including online courses with in-person, didactic and interactive sessions. How does this enrich the learning experience for participants? Dr. Wagar, can we start with you?

**Dr. Elizabeth Wagar:**

I think that online courses provide a lot of in-depth exploration of the subjects, and it is critical to the laboratory directors to understand the more in-depth aspects. Even if they don't memorize every aspect, it is just an important resource and an understanding of what's available to assist. So you understand in the online course how it applies to the in course work and the end of the course assessments. Make sure that key points are kept in mind as well as understood as part of that process. While most of the course involves a significant time commitment, users can access materials easily whenever they have time, and in our busy lives, we often need to learn in small chunks and course design permits you to leave and return, pick up whenever you've left off in the course development.

**Julie McDowell:**

And Dr. Scanlan, what are your thoughts on this?

**Dr. Richard Scanlan:**

Well, the live course is most appreciated for the opportunity to interact with experienced directors and to form contacts with peers facing similar problems and professional challenges. While most people complete the online and in-person training in the same year, some participants find it works better for their schedules to complete the online portion one year, and in-person the next. The CAP staff can work with participants to manage you through the process if needed.

**Julie McDowell:**

Finally, before we wrap up, I know you've both worked very hard to promote excellence in laboratory administration. If you were going to give someone one reason to take this course, what would that be and why? Dr. Scanlan, let's start with you.

**Dr. Richard Scanlan:**

We want to give you the confidence that you know what needs to be done and to do it. Uncertainty about your ability to fill a job is readily perceived by laboratorians, physicians and administrators and does not work in your favor. Self-assurance is critical for leadership, and this course will give you the confidence you will need to get the job done.

**Julie McDowell:**

And finally, Dr. Wagar, your thoughts on this?

**Dr. Elizabeth Wagar:**

Well, my thoughts are that you also get the advantage of forming a network of peers through this process, both experienced directors and those who are in the same place on the learning curve. All of this connection can be of great assistance when you are dealing with things in your institution. Often the laboratory director can feel very alone, and it is reassuring to know that you now have a new network of people for additional questions. Plus, the time we spend discussing inspections and how to prepare for them can be invaluable information for new leaders and bring old leaders up to speed with ever-changing regulations.

**Julie McDowell:**

Great. Well, thank you very much both Dr. Scanlan and Dr. Wagar. As mentioned earlier, the Laboratory Medical Direction course will be offered March 31st through April 1st, 2022 in Chicago. For more information into register, please visit learn.cap.org and search for laboratory medical direction in the search function. Thank you for listening to this CAP cast. To listen to our other episodes, find us on the My CAP app available for CAP members as well as SoundCloud, Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, Google Podcasts, Spotify, and Amazon Music. Just search for CAPcast from the College of American Pathologists on these apps. Once you find our podcast, be sure to click the subscribe button so you don't miss new CAPcast episodes.