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"It's a Jungle Out There" for healthcare providers.

Times are tough. The regulations keep piling on and reimbursement rates have been cut. Competition is fierce and costs are rising. Successful healthcare leaders know they must stay ahead of changes in the marketplace and continue to seek out innovative new revenue opportunities. Navigating through the maze is a challenge and leaders often don't have other leadership resources for help in strategizing the direction of their business.

Now, Clint Maun is offering consulting and executive coaching for healthcare leadership and management. Imagine being able to confidentially discuss daily challenges, opportunities and receive immediate ideas, information and action recommendations for an affordable monthly fee. Essentially, you'd have a personal consultant and life coach on retainer for much less than his on-site fee, with no expenses.

Clint would be available via live webcam, phone conferences and email to discuss and coach on the

challenges successful healthcare leaders face, such as:

- Reimbursement Issues
- Tough employees
- Strategic opportunities
- Methods to improve teamwork
- Revenue strategies
- Merger and acquisition opportunities
- Partnership with other health care providers

If you are interested in having Clint on retainer as a personal and professional advisor and coach, please contact Kathy Cain, VP, 800.356.2233.

Humor in Healthcare

You've probably known and have recognized for years that laughter makes you feel better, but did you know that there's actually scientific evidence that humor and laughter provides substantial health benefits?

Medical studies demonstrate that the natural medicine of humor and the positive emotions humor can:

- boost your immune system
- help stabilize your blood pressure
- stimulate your circulation
- increase the flow of oxygen to your muscles

Humor in Healthcare Settings

The use of appropriate humor can present even more benefits in a healthcare setting. Canadian researchers studied the use of humor in an intensive care unit and palliative care unit, and found that humor can play an essential role in the most serious healthcare settings, even when patients are receiving intensive or end of life care.

Canadian researchers spent nearly 300 hours observing and carrying out interviews with staff, patients and families in an intensive care unit and a palliative care unit for people with terminal illnesses. They concluded that humor played an essential role in promoting team relationships and adding a human dimension to the care and support that staff provided to seriously ill patients and their families.

The researchers found that staff used humor in a number of ways, including:

- To cope with, and sometimes distance themselves, from difficult situations.
- To connect with other healthcare professionals and provide mutual support. Shared laughter energized and nurtured a sense of community.
- To reduce tension when things don't go as well as they could.
- To connect with patients and make them feel cared for as individuals.
- To reduce patients' embarrassment with the indignity of needing help with toileting and other highly personal functions.

The authors of the study concluded that humor was very important in stressful healthcare settings. The researchers noted that nurses and other healthcare professional don't need to suppress humor. They should trust their instincts about when it is appropriate.

*Journal reference: From critical care to comfort care: the sustaining value of humour. Dean R A K and Major J E. Journal of Clinical Nursing. 17, 1088-1095. (April 2008)

"A sense of humor... is needed armor. Joy in one's heart and some laughter on one's lips is a sign that the person down deep has a pretty good grasp of life."

—Hugh Sidey

Small Talk is a Big Deal

Communication skills are a critical requirement to practically every job and the healthcare profession is certainly no exception. When you think or read about communication the focus is probably on effective communication in terms of giving feedback or perhaps body language. While these are indeed important communication elements, there is another communication that is often overlooked or ignored: small talk.

Why is Small Talk so Important?

"Great weather we're having." "Did you catch that game last night?" These are seemingly easy questions you can ask an unfamiliar patient, customer or new colleague that can have a positive and profound impact on your professional relationships. Why? Because small talk helps build the kind of relationships that help you not only be successful in your current job but also go up to higher levels. It helps you collaborate with other people. And of course, collaboration is really important in healthcare—no one is ever as smart on their own as a group is when you can get a good group together. Small talk isn't just about being gregarious or entertaining—it's a gesture of respect.

Moreover, a recent study by researchers at the University Of Michigan found that friendly, social interaction can boost our ability to solve problems. That's because some social interactions induce people to try to read others' minds and take their perspective on things.

Small Talk Tips

Fortunately, making good small talk is a skill that can be learned. Here's a list of strategies that can help you master this art:

- **Make a list of questions you can ask other people.** Focus on questions that aren't too personal and that, chances are, the other person will want to talk about.
- **Focus on open-ended questions.** Ask questions that force the person to answer more than with a simple "yes" or "no". "What's the best book you've read lately?" is an example of a question that will likely spark some good conversation.
- **Keep up on current events, movies and other things people have in common.** When you're up-to-date on current events you will be able to spark and maintain meaningful and genuine conversations.

Remember, don't underestimate the power of easygoing conversation. Small talk can help you in more ways than just simply filling in uncomfortable silence—it can help you collaborate, problem solve and build positive and effective relationships.

*"I often quote myself. It adds spice to my conversation."
—George Bernard Shaw*

Study Shows the Impact of Weekly Phone Contact

Weekly telephone contact with a nurse substantially reduced hospital readmissions for high-risk patients, according to a recent study. The study measured the efficacy of Coordinated Transitional Care, a program used by 605 patients discharged over an 18-month period from the William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital in Madison, Wisconsin.

Study Design & Criteria

High-risk patients were defined either as having dementia or some other impairment in memory, older than 65 and living alone or older than 65 with a previous hospitalization in the last year.

The patients were phoned by a nurse case manager 48 to 72 hours after discharge. The nurse met with each patient before discharge to make arrangements for the phone calls, and with each

patient's hospital providers to help ensure the patient's transition home was as smooth as possible. They spent a lot of time talking about medications, follow-up and the appropriate response to any signs and symptoms that the patient's medical symptoms could be worsening. The patients received weekly phone calls for up to four weeks or until they were transitioned to a primary-care provider.

Noteworthy Results

- The phone follow-up program was well-received by patients. Only one in five patients declined to participate out of more than 600 approached.
- Researchers with the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health reported that healthcare costs decreased by about \$1,225 for each patient enrolled in the program compared with similar patients who were not enrolled.
- Patients in the program were a third less likely to be readmitted than similar patients who were not in the program.

The study was funded by a grant from the VA. Kind estimates that during its first 18 months, the program saved the hospital \$741,125 in healthcare costs. The study appears in the December issue of *Health Affairs*. The study abstract is available at

<http://content.healthaffairs.org/content/31/12/2659.abstract>

"Communication - the human connection - is the key to personal and career success."
—Paul J. Meyer

Answers You *Don't* Want from Your Healthcare Provider!

Q. Do all diagnostic procedures require pre-certification?

A. No. Only those you need.

Q. Can I get coverage for my preexisting conditions?

A. Certainly, as long as they don't require any treatment.

Q. What happens if I want to try alternative forms of medicine?

A. You'll need to find alternative forms of payment.

Q. My pharmacy plan only covers generic drugs, but I need the name brand. I tried the generic medication, but it gave me a stomach ache. What should I do?

A. Poke yourself in the eye.

Q. What if I'm away from home and I get sick?

A. You really shouldn't do that.

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