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# LEADERSHIP IN ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

**A**s environmental services (EVS) leaders, understanding and promoting leadership throughout your organization should be something that is worked on every single day. In the new era of healthcare reform, and with the prevalence of healthcare-associated infections (HAIs), and higher expectations on the hospital environment than ever before, it's our role as EVS leaders to hold ourselves to a higher standard—of the work we do, the people we lead and the patients we serve.

Here I want to share what I think is one of the best stories on leadership in EVS. It comes from a senior-level executive at a large health system. His first assignment in a hospital was to manage Support Services, including EVS. He shared with us a scenario that required some advanced problem-solving skills. The message is something every EVS leader can appreciate: "If you can do this, you can do anything."

Some years ago, this senior executive first began his career as an officer in the Army. After serving his country, he began a career in healthcare as a director of Support Services in a small hospital in Illinois. It was a logical career move, considering he had training in leadership and management, and was fresh out of the military.

One day while at work, two of his team members from EVS were arguing. One team member was angry because she was convinced the other person removed equipment from her cart. She believed the other team member had done so on purpose and had no intention of returning the equipment. The young director listened to the complaint and decided to bring the two team members together. They had a heated discussion about the equipment.

The director decided all three members should go to the closet and see the cart in question. Much to the team member's surprise, she realized her equipment was not missing, and she mistakenly accused her coworker of taking her items. They hugged each other and apologized for the misunderstanding. It was a nice outcome for a problem that needed time and patience, along with good listening skills. In fact, 25 years later, if these two team members are still working at the hospital in Illinois, they are probably best of friends and still working together as a team.

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As the now senior executive is telling us the story, most EVS leaders can remember going through the same scenario at least 100 times. He added that spending time with the team members, asking questions and getting to the bottom of the issue made all the difference in their heated battle. His next statement is worth noting: "If you can do this, you can do anything." It's a nice compliment for EVS leaders, who deal with the same kind of challenges.

There is a nice correlation between this story and the *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey. Habit 5 states: "Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood." This is my favorite habit because it's the most difficult practice to follow. In the scenario described above, the listening skills made all the difference in solving the problem. Asking questions and listening to the team members allowed them to see it was a big misunderstanding. Often we jump to the wrong conclusions based upon incomplete information and lack of understanding. With a little patience and taking time to understand, the better we can be understood by our team. It's a life skill that transfers to everywhere in our lives (work, home, with family and friends, etc.). If you are a successful leader in EVS, then you can undoubtedly do anything you desire.

To further develop your leadership skills, network with like-minded EVS professionals, and learn about the newest and most effective products in the market, be sure to join us at EXCHANGE 2014 in sunny and breezy Tampa, Florida, September 21-24, 2014. I can't wait to see you there! ●

*Portions of this article were originally published in the third quarter (August 2012) issue of AHE's former Phoenix newsletter.*