

## Spring Into Action: Essential Leadership Tools to Help the Team Win Together

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The field of oncology is known for being fast paced, life-threatening, and unpredictable. Stress levels are often at a maximum for patients, caretakers, and the cancer teams that strive to provide efficient care in the workplace. Burnout is a commonality amongst the cancer care team due to long hours, large workloads, and the constant demand for intense and prompt decision making that is often a requirement of the job. Oncology leaders face immense pressure to provide tools and resources for the team and often put their own needs to the side to keep operations running and the larger team happy. While everyone loves an efficient leader, no one wants a burnt-out leader.

An efficient team needs a leader that is transparent, accessible, and willing to let them have a voice and contribute to the organization in meaningful ways. Leaders can build strong teams by recognizing the need for work-life balance, team empowerment, and a solid support system. Here are 3 strategies that leaders can do immediately to stay sane and make a positive impact with their teams.

### Normalize Life and Work Balance and Refuse to Feel Guilty for Having a Life Outside of Work

Many leaders put in countless hours in the workplace, focused on helping to provide patient services, training teams, and supporting clinical providers to care for patients and their families. Like most working professionals, leaders also have personal lives outside work, which include spouses, children, parents, friends, and other loved ones. There have been many times in my career when I felt the

overwhelming need to be present at work and sensed there was a silent requirement to prioritize work over my personal life. A myriad of examples come to mind as I reflect over my career that include answering a work call while attending the funeral services for a family friend that lost a 3-year-old niece to cancer or even feeling it was necessary to bring my work laptop as I accompanied my mom as she received chemotherapy to treat her breast cancer. In retrospect I realize that it is okay to step away from work and allow my team to ensure all pressing tasks are completed in my absence.

Leadership guilt is real, and it can even extend to feeling ashamed for leaving work while the sun is still up or even not responding to a work email on a weekend during non-work hours. At some point we must recognize that we must set positive examples for our employees by defining work and personal boundaries. When you are on the proverbial work clock, lean in, work hard, and do the best that you can and then challenge yourself to erase unrealistic expectations and incorporate respect for yourself and loved ones in your personal life by choosing to be fully present. This will take practice and commitment to breaking bad habits that most of us leaders have incorporated into our routine and accepted as the norm.

One action you can take: **Give yourself permission to fully detach from work by creating a specific time to disconnect from work daily.** Set a timer on your phone, put alerts in Outlook to hold your messages, and most importantly hold yourself accountable by committing to this boundary for 7 days and then evaluate and modify as necessary.

### Prepare the Team for Efficiency in Your Absence by Empowering Them to Lead in Your Presence

Helicopter leaders do exist! Many leaders want the best for their teams and to prove how much they care about them, they hover, and provide few instances for individuals to flex their decision-making skills. Health care is such a high-stakes environment that you must micromanage employees, right? Wrong! The frontline staff, especially those that work in specialized areas like oncology, are often dedicated, skilled, and ready to step up to any challenge that comes their way.

In my current line of work as an executive coach and leadership development professional, it is not uncommon for me to hear leaders voice concern about taking time away from the office. They say things like, "What if a situation arises?" and "Who will help them make decisions in my absence?" It is reasonable to want the best for the team and it should be conceivable and commonplace for operations to run, patient satisfaction to excel, and the business to thrive with or without the presence of the leader. The bottom line is this: Staff want to show you they can and will do their best and achieve great outcomes with and without your help. Give them the space and chance to show you what they can do.

One action you can take: **Choose a low-stakes, high-impact project and allow the team to take the lead.** Although it may be difficult, let the team shine and highlight their critical thinking skills and superb problem-solving abilities while you intentionally take the backseat and offer limited guidance or input. At the start of the project, let the team know that you trust them and

want them to take the lead and celebrate them after a job well done.


### **Find a Trusted Peer Who Can Double as an Accountability Partner**

Leadership can feel lonely, although there is rarely a lack of people to help, support, fix, listen to, and develop. There is often limited time for thought-provoking discussion or deep reflections in between meetings and managing deliverables. Stress is commonplace in many management positions, and it is known that establishing relationships and engaging with peers who have similar workloads and responsibilities can help alleviate the feeling that you are alone. It is important to prioritize your mental health by creating positive coping mechanisms.

As a leader, you have work goals, personal goals, and work-life balance boundaries that you need to continuously monitor and evaluate. Without an accountability partner, you can easily slip into “grind mode” or begin to regress in your efforts to be a well-rounded leader. Recognize that other leaders have similar challenges, and it can be beneficial to lean on someone else in an intentional and routine manner.

One action you can take: **Identify an accountability partner and meet on a regular basis.** Choose a person who is in a similar position and who can appreciate the complexities you face in your professional and personal life.

This should be a person that you are comfortable being honest and vulnerable with as you share the progress and regressions that you face as you attempt to accomplish your goals.

Leaders that regularly practice a healthy work and life balance are better prepared to accomplish tasks without feeling overwhelmed. They feel pride as they allow their teams to take the lead on important projects and build confidence that the organization will not erupt into chaos if they are not present. They ultimately recognize that it takes a village to be a well-rounded leader and that includes a support system. Effective and impactful teams are led by self-aware leaders that understand the importance of empowering the team, unapologetically observing a healthy work-life balance with the support of a trusted accountability partner. Choose to be your best self by prioritizing awareness, participating in self-growth, and taking action-oriented steps toward a sustainable leadership approach that will inspire and benefit the care team. 

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