Developing Your Professional Identity

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Learning Objectives
• Participants will better understand the concept of professional identity.
• Participants will appreciate how careful understanding and development of professional identity can reap tremendous dividends for themselves (young physician leaders), their patients, and their health care organizations.
• Participants will learn different methods to better understand and develop their professional identities.
• Participants will commit to at least one exercise to more clearly understand or develop their professional identity.

Why should I care about my “professional identity”?
• Our professional identity helps to answer the “Big Questions”...
  – Who am I?
  – Why am I here?
  – How should I live?
• The ability to answer these questions in a meaningful way is critical to professional success and fulfillment.

What is “professional identity”?
• The concept of identity...
  – Freud: “Love and work are the cornerstones of our humanness.”

What is “professional identity”?
• Solomon, 2007: Professional identity formation is an adaptive process that emerges at the intersection of the mental (psychology) and the material (specific actions).
• What goes into “professional identity” formation?
  – Personal factors (e.g. individual history) or “self-oriented” identity
  – Social factors (e.g. cultural norms) or “domain-oriented” identity

Rob’s Framework for Thinking about Professional Identity

Individual mind
Cultural Mind
Cultural Actions
Individual actions
The Relationship Between Thoughts, Feelings, and Behaviors

Professional Identity: Medicine’s Cultural “Mind”

- Healer
- Nonmaleficence (“First, do no harm.”)
- Teacher
- Committed/ hard-working
- Autonomous
- Trustworthy
- Selfless/ altruistic
- Collegiality
- Valued and integrated into the community
- No real recognition of differences between specialties and practice settings.

Medicine’s Identity Crisis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“MIND”</th>
<th>“ACTIONS”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autonomous Healer</td>
<td>EBM, pre- auths, URI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonmaleficence</td>
<td>Medical errors, unnecessary</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>procedures, harmful medications,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Cutting GME</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increases in students, but</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>not faculty</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching only in AMCs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trustworthy</td>
<td>HIPAA, malpractice, etc.</td>
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Professional Identity: Medicine’s Archetypes

- Shamans, “medicine men”, healers
- Hippocratic tradition
- Early pioneers (e.g. Galen, Paracelsus, Rush, etc.)
- Modern academic giants (e.g. Osler, Harrison, DeBakey, etc.)
- Modern fictional depictions of physicians (e.g. Dr. Marcus Welby, Dr. Doug Ross, Dr. Gregory House, Dr. Bob Kelso, etc.)
- Antitheses: charlatans, snake oil salesmen, butchers, etc.

What is your individual “mind” about you as a physician?

- This may include:
  - Your childhood experiences
  - Your beliefs and perceptions when you selected this profession
  - Your role models during training and early in your career

- How does this conflict with your actions? Which (actions or mind) needs to change?

- Based on your experiences, is your “mind” realistic, or does it need to be modified?

- How might your career path be influenced by this “mind”? Is there a practice environment that is consistent with your “mind”?
Common Identity Conflicts for Physician Leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Conflict/Issue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family/Personal Interests</td>
<td>Work demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altruism</td>
<td>Economic pressures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader/manager</td>
<td>Solidarity with other physicians/health care workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring, compassionate</td>
<td>Efficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner feelings of incompetence</td>
<td>Expectation of full expertise</td>
</tr>
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</table>

How can I get back on the true-self “trail”?  
- Read your med school/residency application essays
- Ask your parents/siblings
- Ask your colleagues, friends, spouse, or even patients (with caution)
- Meditate/pray
- "Process time"
- Keep a journal
- Take care of “basic needs” first!

Basic Needs We Often Neglect
- Do YOU have:  
  - A balanced diet?  
  - Regular physical, mental, and spiritual exercise?  
  - Regular time with family and friends?  
  - A primary care doctor?  
  - A dentist?  
  - Life insurance?  
  - Disability insurance?  
  - Adequate malpractice coverage?  
  - Retirement savings?
- Taking care of these basic needs first is the only way we can consistently “self-actualize”.

Let Your Life Speak!
- Vocation does not come from a voice “out there” calling me to become something I am not. It comes from a voice “in here” calling me to be the person I was born to be, to fulfill the original selfhood given me at birth by God.
  - Parker Palmer, Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation

From The Purpose Driven Life
- DISCOVER YOUR SHAPE  
  - Assess your gifts and abilities
  - Consider your heart and your personality
  - Examine your experiences and extract the lessons you have learned
- ACCEPT AND ENJOY YOUR SHAPE  
  - Use caution around comparisons, criticisms, and commendations
- KEEP DEVELOPING YOUR SHAPE  
  - Use it or lose it!
From **Good to Great**

- First Who... Then What
- Confront the Brutal Facts (Yet Never Lose Faith)
- The Hedgehog Concept (Simplicity within the Three Circles)
- A Culture of Discipline

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3 Circles of the Hedgehog Concept

- **Your PASSION**
- What are you BEST at?
- What drives your ECONOMIC engine?

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- **Now I become myself.**
  It’s taken time, many years and places. I have been dissolved and shaken, worn other people’s faces...
  – May Sarton

- **Take your practiced powers and stretch them out**
  until they span the chasm between the two contradictions. For the god wants to know himself in you.
  – Rainer Maria Rilke

- **Since we find ourselves fashioned into all those excellently formed and marvelously functioning parts in Christ’s body, let us just go ahead and be what we were made to be.**
  – Romans 12:5