

MEETING THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE IN LONG-TERM CARE

What you do Matters

LEADERSHIP ROUNDS

Rounds to Check In on People, not to Check Up on People

What are Leadership Rounds?

Slow lingering, leadership rounds are a way to identify stressors, build relationships, pitch in, note good work, and ensure that staff have what they need to do their job; not to catch people doing something wrong. These rounds differ from safety rounds or other checking up rounds in that they are intentional relationship building and supporting rounds.

Use these lingering rounds to strengthen relationships, provide support, and be a positive presence, throughout the day and throughout the organization. This kind of rounding allows you to see people at their best and to spot opportunities for people development potential. Take note of people's good work and good interpersonal skills. Stop and compliment people, very specifically noting what you saw and appreciated. This rounding is an opportunity to build positive momentum. Intentionally ask what is going well, who has been going above the expected. Spread the good by letting other departments and people know when something good has been shared.

Why do Rounds this way?

Health care is a people business. It's about the residents and their families, and our staff who care for them. Therefore, health care leaders must regularly connect, face-to-face, with the people doing the work and delivering the care. And they need to visit with and talk to the residents and their families. Leaders' ability to prioritize their time and get out of their office and conduct frequent and effective rounds is critical to the success of the organization. Leadership presence and visibility on the units and in resident rooms modeling excellent customer relations is key.

What matters most to staff is that management cares, listens, and helps with job stress. Staff stress is detrimental to the well-being of staff, residents, and organizations. By rounding regularly for the purpose of reducing stress, administrators make it easier for staff to do their jobs. Rounding provides a regular presence through which leaders are accessible to staff to listen to their needs and ideas, and demonstrate their caring through the little acts of help, support, and affirmation. Rounding to facilitate strong relationships with and among staff builds trust and teamwork; working well together makes the day better for everyone who lives and works together.

Quint Studer, in *Hardwiring Excellence*, writes: “The problem is not motivation. It is the ways in which we unintentionally de-motivate employees.” Many leaders unknowingly ignore their staff. Their staff are, or feel, invisible to them. The most common forms of feedback are silence or negative feedback. Rounding is an opportunity to provide positive feedback and let staff know you see them, person to person. Communication during rounds allows you to catch your staff doing something right and let them know they have been caught. Every hour, employees are committing acts of compassion. Let them know you saw them and appreciate it. Boost their self-esteem by noticing and commenting on their good work. Have and express high standards and expectations.

When to do it

Rounds should be conducted a few times throughout the day. First rounds should be conducted as soon as the leader arrives. Never allow yourself to get trapped in the office looking at email. It's less important than getting out and seeing what's going on out on the units. Leaders should conduct rounds before the morning stand-up meeting. Round early in each shift to make sure staff have what they need to do their jobs and give administrators crucial information about how the day is going early enough to be able to take needs in hand.

Round at other high stress times of the day, to provide hands-on support and facilitate people's work together. A second set of rounds is ideally conducted at the residents' lunchtime hour. A third set of rounds is conducted at the change of shift from 2:30 – 3:30 PM. At this time, we monitor shift hand-offs and thank the day shift staff while we welcome the evening shift staff. Linger near the time clock and maximize your exposure to people. Finally, conduct a last set of rounds before you leave for the day.

Also, come in on weekends and conduct rounds and visit at night at least twice per month. Your regular presence in this traditionally “off hours” for management signals to staff how much you care about them, gives you a finger on the pulse of your 24/7 operation, and makes you accessible to staff so they can let you know their needs.

The key is to do rounds religiously because visibility must stay a priority. It is not the first to eliminate when other demands arise; it is the practice that will help you address those demands.

How to do it

Rounds are not a race – slow down. It's the quality of the walkthrough that will get you results.

During rounds, ask staff how their work is going, what's working well, what isn't, and what they need. This is a time to reduce stress by being totally in tune with what people need to do their job. Pitch in to help out and also to model teamwork. Save steps by picking up a tray, cleaning a spill on the floor, answering a call light, as you move through. Keep track of what people ask for and follow-up to ensure that their needs are met. Check in on whether the equipment was fixed, people have the supplies they need, how a new resident or staff person is settling in. Follow-up in a personal way, as well, on a staff person who was out ill or had an ill family member, or how the children are doing. Focus on being accessible, tuning in, and building relationships.

It is important to be a positive force, whenever you are walking through the building. The single most noticeable and important behavior is to establish eye contact, smile, and say “hello” to employees, residents, physicians, visitors as you walk along instead of being absorbed in your own thoughts with a concerned look on your face.

David Farrell offers these tips for effective rounds:

Mood/Posture/Paradigm

Leaders need to understand that they are in the spotlight when they leave their office and walk on to the nursing units. Everyone sees us, listens to what we say and watches what we do. With this fact always in mind, all leaders need to flip a switch and put themselves in a proper frame of mind before they conduct their rounds. We have to conscientiously model the attitude and behavior we hope to see in our employees. Be a positive force. Energize the staff to perform better by your presence and influence – by what you say and do. Keeping employee morale up requires a constant effort. When leaders make consistent and sincere gestures of caring and listening to the staff and the patients it helps to put the staff at their best.

Content – What Leaders Say and Do

Do – *answer call lights, hold doors open for people, hand out granola bars, smile, wave to residents, make eye contact with all those looking at you, sit in the break room, sit on the end of a resident’s bed and talk with them, shake hands, kiss cheeks, rub shoulders, carry leftover food trays back to the kitchen, move a linen barrel to where it should be, look in – utility rooms, shower rooms, resident bathrooms, kitchen, break room. Be helpful to staff and residents.*

Say – *“thank you, can I help you with that, can I save you some steps, how’s staffing today, what’s frustrating you today, do you have all the supplies you need today, does all of the equipment work well today, I’m proud of you, how’s your son doing, thanks a lot for helping her with that, thanks for being here today, thanks for all of your help today, I’m sorry about that, I’m worried about, is everyone treating you respectfully...”*

Keep Notes and Follow Up

Leaders should be making observations and receiving feedback during rounds that will require follow-up. Therefore, be sure to take along a pen and small piece of paper in order to make some notes. Don’t carry your cell phone in your hand during rounds. Leave your cell phone in your office so that you can keep your focus on the people in front of you. Be sure to follow-up with people you interacted with. To build organizational trust, people need to feel that the leader is listening to them. Be open and honest with the staff. Even if you can’t honor every request be sure they know that you gave it some thought.

Health care employees are highly sensitive and responsive to the immediate context of their physical and social environment. Effective leaders positively influence the staff by making specific changes that matter the most to the employees and the residents. The key is to conduct more effective rounds. Be more conscientious in how you conduct your rounds. Adopt some of these tips and self-reflect about your impact on people.

Use Rounds to:

- Meet and greet, linger
- Observe – processes of care, handoffs
- Praise, build self-esteem
- Build trust
- Foster teamwork
- Ask about needs and deliver

Notice any stressors that you can address:

- How far are people walking to fax something
- Who answers the phone after 5 PM and on weekends
- How far do staff walk for linen
- Are the dirty linen barrels within easy reach
- What kind of chairs are they sitting on

Rounding for Outcomes:

- **Quint Studer**, in *Hardwiring Excellence*, says to start with a personal relationship building question and then get more specific with the questions in order to drill down to the needs that you can ask about and deliver on. Studer identifies five areas in your rounding:
- **Relationship Building:** Start by asking the staff personal questions in order to build the relationship, such as “How are your beautiful kids doing?”
- **Focus on the Positive:** Ask: “What is working well today?” This question switches staff focus from the negative to the positive. As clinicians, we are trained to look at what is wrong. By drawing out the positive, you are also able to acknowledge and thank people for their good work.
- **Positive Feedback Loop:** Ask: “Is there anybody who has gone above and beyond the call of duty today?” This allows the leader to get names and specific behaviors in order to compliment individuals. Harvest the win by sharing the feedback, creating positive feedback loops between the staff and the departments. For example if a nurse says, “the meals went smoothly and the residents really liked the lasagna,” the leader can harvest that compliment by stopping by food services and saying, “I was just on Unit two and Sue the nurse said the meal service was great today and the residents loved the lasagne.” That spreads through food services like wild fire. How do you think the food service for Unit two will be the next day? This builds goodwill, relationships, trust, relational coordination.

- **QI - Systems Focus:** Ask: “Is there anything we can do better?” Keep your finger on the pulse of what systems are breaking down so that you can put your attention to addressing them.
- **Needs:** Ask: “Do you have the tools and equipment to do your job?” Find out what’s causing stress. Look for “quick wins” that can reduce stress and help people do their jobs.

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