LEADERSHIP IN PRACTICE
Preparing Tomorrow’s Leaders with the Program for Leadership Development

Rising health care costs, evolving payment structures, and shifting models of care have put immense pressure on all health care providers—including Boston Children’s Hospital, one of the largest and most well-known pediatric medical centers in the United States. With an ambitious four-part mission including patient care, research, teaching, and service to the community, the hospital entered the new century facing diverse challenges.

Recognizing how quickly the health care landscape was changing, they set out to build the strategies—and the team—that would enable Boston Children’s Hospital to evolve and thrive in the years to come.

Committed to developing leaders from within the organization, Boston Children’s Hospital turned to the Program for Leadership Development (PLD) from Harvard Business School (HBS) Executive Education for help.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT (PLD)

With a focus on leadership, change, and innovation, PLD shapes future leaders through a transformational experience that presents an integrated view of the fundamentals of management. In an intense four-module learning experience that includes professional coaching and the development of a personal action plan, participants expand their leadership capabilities, improve their decision-making skills and gain critical cross-functional insight.

Learn More about PLD here
MOVING THE CAMERA, WIDENING THE APERTURE

Like most of his colleagues at Boston Children’s Hospital, Vincent Chiang was trained as a doctor and learned about management on the job. The Program for Leadership Development delivered the formal training Dr. Chiang was looking for—along with a completely new outlook on the nature of leadership.

Q. What stands out about your PLD experience?
I’ve attended five graduate schools at Harvard University, and my experience at HBS Executive Education was by far the most impressive. It was truly a transformative experience. In particular, the group’s diversity expanded my horizons. Out of 150 people, only two others were physicians. It was freeing to talk with people who didn’t think like doctors. Working together to solve problems helped me widen my personal aperture and view every situation from a broader perspective. I think I will be a better team member from now on.

Q. How did PLD affect your view of leaders?
I’d always thought leadership was about the individual behaving in a leader-like and impressive way so that others would follow. But on the first night of PLD, faculty member Das Narayandas said, “The most important question in leadership is how do others perceive themselves in your presence?” A lightbulb went off. I learned the importance of seeing through someone else’s eyes. To motivate people and advance the organization’s goals, you must be able to see other people’s points of view and realize how your actions affect them.

Why is Citizen Kane considered one of the greatest movies of all time? Orson Welles did something new. He moved the camera—changed the perspective—which is what I have to do to be a better leader. Now, when I measure my success, I focus less on what I did and more on how individuals on the team feel about their actions and accomplishments.

Q. How is PLD impacting the way you approach leadership challenges?
Health care is under tremendous pressure today. People are asked to do more and more with less and less. While I’d always used words like “teamwork” and “collaboration,” now they are not just words—they are primary drivers for doing what we need to do. Being able to sit down, have a discussion, and really get to know other people’s point of view has made it easier to create processes that work and to accomplish more as a group.

Q. Has your team noticed changes in your leadership?
They make fun of me sometimes, but I think they do see the change in me. I hope they feel that everyone is free to fully engage and to fail at times without repercussions, because that’s the only way people will do their best work, think outside the box, and move the organization forward.

Q. What advice would you give organizations considering sending people to PLD?
Do it! The return on investment is unbelievable. But you need to think about what the organization will do with the knowledge and perspective those people bring back. For individuals to be able to really change the culture, to execute on what they’ve learned and advance the agenda of the organization, they need top executive support—from the boardroom on down.

“It was freeing to talk with people who didn’t think like doctors.”

VINCENT W. CHIANG, MD
Vice Chair, Department of Medicine
Program for Leadership Development 2011
DEVELOPING
THE TOOLS TO
EMBRACE CHANGE

Q. How did PLD provide you with insight into your own skills?
The 360-degree feedback exercise was unexpected and very helpful. Physicians come from a culture where the doctor is the authority, so it was scary at first to ask for opinions from others. But it’s very, very helpful to receive positive and negative feedback, to learn how your leadership style affects other people, and to identify which elements are most or least effective. As part of that exercise, we also received excellent coaching that was truly tailored to our individual needs.

Q. How will you apply what you learned in the hospital environment?
We tend to think that the field of medicine is different from other industries. In PLD, we learned that some frameworks can be applied to all organizations. Whether you are running a hospital or an auto manufacturer or a bank, the principles at the highest level are the same. For example, templates for mapping out a business strategy have been very helpful for mapping out the strategy and processes for an operating room.

Q. What impact has PLD had on your organization?
A dozen or so of our physicians have completed PLD. When we sit at a table together, we share a common language and know what we need to accomplish. We’re in different parts of the clinical environment, but our objectives are the same.

PLD has also given us a more institutional perspective on how we approach challenges. In the past, we might ask, “How is this going to affect my practice or the way I deal with patients?” Now we say, “What does the institution need and how do we mold physician behavior so that everyone can still deliver excellent care in ways that further the institution’s other goals?”

Q. How is PLD helping you and fellow PLD participants manage change at Children’s Hospital?
We need to take a very large organization full of very independent-minded physicians and develop a shared understanding of the changes we need to make. This is not something you learn how to do in medical school. In PLD, we gained the tools needed to engage our physician colleagues, disseminate information, and get buy-in at all levels. We learned that communication must flow in both directions. Leaders need input from the front lines, and people need to understand the rationale behind a change.

“We received excellent coaching that was truly tailored to our individual needs.”

LYNNE R. FERRARI, MD
Chief, Division of Perioperative Anesthesia Program for Leadership Development 2012

Lynne Ferrari, medical director of the operating room and chief of perioperative anesthesia for Boston Children’s Hospital, knew that her nearly three decades of clinical experience would not be enough to help the hospital build on its success. Wanting to understand how a large, successful organization can change and grow, Dr. Ferrari enrolled in the Program for Leadership Development.

Q. How did your fellow participants enhance the learning experience?
In my PLD class of 103 people, there were just three physicians. It was so valuable to hear the different perspectives people brought from their own industry, business, or country. When a hundred-plus people spend several weeks together, incredibly tight connections develop. Everyone who has gone through PLD says they made a hundred new best friends.

Watch the video here
EXPANDING SKILLS, EXPANDING VALUE

STEVEN FISHMAN, MD
Senior Associate in Surgery
Program for Leadership Development 2009

A senior associate in surgery at Boston Children's Hospital, Steven Fishman wanted to help his organization close the divide between clinical expertise and management expertise. He turned to the Program for Leadership Development to build a broader set of business and leadership skills.

Q. What challenges prompted you to attend PLD?
The skills needed to succeed in clinical work or research are very different from those needed to run a health care organization. This often results in a disconnect: the people performing medical or scientific work don’t know much about business, and the people managing the hospital don’t understand the clinical work they support. The field needs more clinicians who can also work as business leaders to support the whole infrastructure and grow the mission. PLD is helping Children’s Hospital move in that direction.

Q. What was the highlight of your PLD experience?
PLD was the first time in 25 years that I had spent intellectual time in a concentrated fashion with anyone outside medicine. I developed intense relationships with people from many different areas and cultures. I’ve made lifelong friends I trust and can continue to lean on for advice, consultation, a listening ear, and sometimes a shoulder.

Q. What surprised you most about the program?
I was struck by the fact that the training path in medicine is quite long and narrow, resulting in delayed maturation. We go to college, finish medical school, train in a specialty, do a residency and a fellowship, and then start at the bottom of the totem pole in our early 30s. A decade or more later, we may take on leadership responsibility. In PLD, I learned a lot from other participants who were a decade younger but had far more experience in management and leadership.

Q. How did PLD change your view of yourself?
The program really helped me understand how I interact with others. While we were viewing a video of a group exercise, our coach hit the pause button and said, “Steve, do you understand how what you just said changed the dynamic? If you hadn’t done it that way, the group would have reached the correct answer 20 minutes earlier.” It was enlightening to see myself on video, hear that observation, and watch my peers nod their heads.

Q. How has PLD enhanced your skills as a leader?
PLD improved my ability to draw out the opinions of others and help them express their thoughts so that they can add more value. Colleagues have noticed that I’ve changed the way I interact in meetings—I now listen more than I speak. I’ve learned that, given my personality, I’ll eventually get my thoughts out. But if I listen to what other people have to say first, I might not have to say anything. Sometimes other people have a better idea.

Q. How would you summarize the value of PLD?
This program builds the skills of people with great natural abilities by putting them in a setting where they can learn through intense interactions with peers. PLD has helped me develop personally, and I’m now able to better serve the institution and my colleagues.

“PLD improved my ability to draw out the opinions of others.”
MAKING A MORE STRATEGIC CONTRIBUTION

MARVIN HARPER, MD
Chief Medical Information Officer
Program for Leadership Development 2009

Trained as a physician, Marvin Harper recently transitioned from his clinical role to become chief medical information officer for Boston Children’s Hospital. The Program for Leadership Development gave Dr. Harper the knowledge and vocabulary necessary to step confidently into his new position and tackle a broad array of business challenges.

Q. Why was the time right for PLD?
As I have been drawn into strategy discussions, I have become more convinced that even very smart people don’t automatically know the right thing to do. Greater participation in decision making brings a responsibility to understand the big picture—such as the impact of a decision on clinical care as well as on finances and other components of the institution. I attended PLD to develop broader business knowledge and skills so that I could sit down with colleagues, ask the right questions, and discuss business issues in a credible way.

Q. How did peer interactions enhance your learning?
The peer group at PLD is remarkable—full of exceptionally high-caliber individuals. I learned as much from them as from the formal teaching. The living group discussions were particularly valuable for problem solving. Because people from different industries brought different perspectives, we could view one problem from many angles. It was good to realize that health care is not unique and that I can learn a lot from other industries.

Q. How did the curriculum prepare you for the tasks you face at work?
We learned how to break down problems into their simplest components. I vividly remember one discussion where the x-axis represented an employee’s people skills and the y-axis represented technical skills. We discussed the fact that it’s very hard to find someone who has both of sets of skills at a high level. The take-away was that you need to craft the job so that a real individual will be able to perform it, rather than just creating a job that matches the task.

Q. What has been the program’s impact on you as a leader?
PLD has helped me as a team leader, a team strategist, and a team member. I learned that if you understand more about leadership and what comprises a good team, you’ll be able to function better at any of those levels.

In addition, being well versed in the business vocabulary helps me feel comfortable in strategy discussions with executive committees and department chiefs. I can discuss business principles with confidence and speak with credibility—even in areas with which I’m less familiar, such as marketing, finance, and supply-chain management.

Q. What advice do you have for organizations considering PLD?
PLD is a particularly useful program for molding your rising stars into strategic thinkers. Choose the people wisely, set clear expectations for why you are sending them, and then establish a framework for helping them put their new skills and knowledge to use. The program offers the opportunity to execute individual projects, and if the participants know that their efforts can deliver value for the organization, these exercises will be even more meaningful.

“The program has helped me as a team leader, a team strategist, and a team member.”
Q. What challenges do you face in developing physicians as leaders?
We need leaders who can be change managers and can help us evolve our value proposition. They also need to be able to connect the dots and say, “Here is the broader goal and here’s how it translates into what our team does.” Many of our leaders are highly intelligent and extraordinarily skilled in their disciplines, but they typically haven’t built “management muscle.” They need a set of soft skills that complement the harder clinical or research skills.

Q. What role does the Program for Leadership Development play in your efforts to develop future leaders?
PLD puts a mirror up to executives, providing 360-degree feedback and coaching sessions with an expert who says, “Here’s what you’re strong in, here’s what you’re weak in, and here’s what you had better go back and try if you’re going to build yourself into the kind of leader that’s required.” When people return from PLD, one of the first things they talk about is that feedback. It feels like a gift to them.

We do some leadership training internally, but an outside program like PLD provides participants with the opportunity to see what their peers in other industries are doing. The experience tones down their belief that “I can figure it out because I’m so smart.” They discover that leaders in other industries seek out opportunities to improve leadership skills.

The people we send to PLD are high-potential physicians that have the ability to build their leadership skills. When they come back, they are often put on high-profile task forces or policy groups to give them even broader exposure. Everyone who has gone through this program has come back and made an impact beyond his or her clinical discipline.

Q. What is the impact of PLD on your organization?
The program has had a huge impact on how people think about leadership and how they view themselves. They’re more confident and more willing to try things. They tend to be more innovative. And they begin to read more broadly about business and leadership.

These highly educated doctors find PLD intellectually challenging. Many realized they were behind the curve in business skills compared to their peers in the program. One participant told me, “I didn’t know a supply chain from a supply closet. After PLD, I feel that I understand much more about business strategy issues. I understand how to lead a large department.”

We hold sessions for our PLD participants where they talk about strategies they have implemented or tried out. We see that they have faced up to issues in their department, that they are better able to coach their team, that they know how to deal with challenging employees—and that they are simply more confident as leaders.

“Everyone who has gone through this program has come back and made an impact.”
As vice-chair of neurosurgery at Boston Children’s Hospital, **Mark Proctor** found himself increasingly called upon to speak the language of business. In the Program for Leadership Development, he found knowledge to complement his medical training and help him foster effective teamwork in a complex organization.

**Q. What stands out most about your PLD experience?**

The level of instruction was simply outstanding—and I say that as someone who is also an educator. I’d sit through a PLD lecture for an hour and a half, and I’d be shocked when the professor said “time’s up” because it was so unbelievably interesting.

The program is a time for introspection and focus because it provides the opportunity to spend a couple of weeks just concentrating on yourself as a leader.

All the time you spend at PLD is about you.

**Q. How did your living group enhance the learning?**

At PLD, you live with up to eight people from completely different professions in different parts of the world. At first you think, “How am I going to relate to these people?” But one of the key strengths of the program is this interaction. As we shared our diverse perspectives, we discovered that we all faced the same problems. When we listened to each other’s challenges, we were able to apply our experience to help.

**Q. How did PLD make a difference in your skill set?**

PLD added immensely to my knowledge of finance, strategy, operations, and organizational psychology—understanding how people work together. I developed skills for problem solving on an organizational level—how to take a complex situation, break it down into the different problems, and figure out what’s not working.

**Q. How can improved leadership skills have an impact on care delivery?**

PLD teaches you a lot about working with teams. At Children’s Hospital, teams need to function effectively for the sake of the patient. Whether it’s a team working together in the operating room or a team running the hospital, if the leader doesn’t know how to guide the team, you’re going to see failure. For patient care, that means the potential for a serious mistake and a negative outcome.

**Q. As more people from Children’s Hospital have attended PLD, what has been the impact on your organization?**

My colleagues who have been through PLD were excellent physicians and team members to start, but the program strengthened them as leaders. We are developing a cadre of mid- to upper-level physicians who really understand leadership and institutional dynamics. They know finance and accounting, but more important, they have a clear understanding of how people can work together effectively across the institution and help lead the next phase of the organization’s development.

**Q. What individuals are the best fit for PLD?**

PLD is excellent for someone who is clearly on a trajectory toward leadership, but is at a career midpoint. The skills that got you to a certain point in your career are not necessarily the skills that will help you move forward, and PLD puts you in a better position for assuming any kind of leadership role.

“PLD puts you in a better position for assuming any kind of leadership role.”
Although Reza Rahbar’s role as associate otolaryngologist-in-chief at Boston Children’s Hospital comes with administrative responsibilities, his experience in business and finance was limited. When his CEO suggested he attend the Program for Leadership Development, he took advantage of the opportunity to build business knowledge, broaden his perspective, and build on his strengths as a leader.

Q. How did you prepare for PLD?
As a physician, I had no appreciation of how much science and intelligence really exist behind business concepts. As I talked with others who had attended the program, I began to understand the wealth of knowledge I would encounter at PLD. I identified several areas that I wanted to focus on, such as the financial aspect of health care administration, the process of strategic planning, and people management.

Q. How did peer interaction contribute to the PLD experience?
I really appreciated the opportunity to take time away from work and learn in a very intense environment with a fascinating group of people. The experience was amazing because of the opportunity to interact with so many interesting individuals from completely different backgrounds. Out of 109 participants, only two were physicians. There was a broad age range—from someone who had started their own company and sold it at the age of 25 or 26, to others who had been in leadership positions for more than 20 years.

In medicine, we are trained to look at things through one lens. At PLD, I saw how different people view the same concept through different lenses.

Q. How did PLD change your view of your career?
One PLD exercise in particular was quite difficult and had a big impact on me. We had to write an essay as if it were 10 years later and imagine ourselves reflecting back on our professional and personal life, assessing what we had accomplished and whether we were happy with those accomplishments. That was a really effective way of putting my career into a broader perspective.

The timing was perfect. If I’d attended this program five years earlier or 10 years later, it would not have been so beneficial. As I was listening to a discussion, I would recall something that happened five years ago and finally understand it. You need to have some successes and failures behind you to get the most out of this program.

Q. How are you applying what you have learned?
I now look at financial statements quite differently. I now understand the meaning behind the numbers and can ask better questions. In addition, I am more effective when it comes to planning, management, strategy, and administration.

Q. Has your approach to leadership changed?
I now manage my team differently. The program taught me the science behind teams and provided tools for building a team, implementing a team’s goal, and getting buy-in from everyone. I now have a much better understanding of my strengths and weaknesses as a leader. In addition, PLD helped me realize that I need to help each team member improve their skills and performance to meet their own professional and personal goals.

“I am more effective when it comes to planning, management, strategy, and administration.”
Q. How did PLD help you build new skills?
PLD offers a safe, supportive learning environment, but it takes you outside your standard silo, where you’ve been effective and where you are comfortable. Doctors and scientists tend to think there’s a right answer for everything and that numbers have to be very precise. When we started the finance exercises, I obsessed about getting to the right number. Once in class, however, I’d realize that much of it was back-of-the-napkin math, and then I would really begin to understand the concepts. This learning process was typical of many of the program topics. I’d go in with some baseline expectations, not realizing how much I didn’t know, and then I would learn the method and how to be quite precise in my use of it.

Q. How are you approaching your role as a leader differently now?
After PLD, the core of my leadership style is still the same, but a lot is different around the edges. For example, I orchestrate meetings differently, ask questions in a different manner, and solicit opinions more. I am more patient, and I now know when to follow someone else’s lead.

In addition, PLD gave me a greater understanding of how to empower teams and how put together a team that will cooperate well. As a leader, you must have a vision of where you are going, but you also must be able to enable people to come up with a better result than you would have found on your own.

Q. How does a shared PLD experience benefit an organization?
Most of us have become very skilled at thinking and solving problems on our own, but business challenges are often best addressed as a team. Sending multiple people to PLD has a snowball effect. When colleagues have been to PLD, you can engage in a very dynamic way and produce a better result. For example, when I serve on committees with others who have also attended PLD, that common bond and common language are very helpful.

Q. After PLD, you enrolled in other HBS Executive Education programs. What brought you back?
I wanted to keep fertilizing my brain and reinforcing new habits of thinking and acting. People at HBS have recommended specific programs. Along the way, I was able to earn HBS alumni status, which provides other resources for continuing my business education.

“PLD offers a safe, supportive learning environment, but it takes you outside your standard silo.”
CREATING THE ORGANIZATION’S FUTURE—ONE LEADER AT A TIME

As outgoing and incoming CEO, respectively, at Boston Children’s Hospital, James Mandell and Sandra Fenwick have developed strategies that will enable the institution to thrive in an industry undergoing incredible change. Recognizing that these strategies demand leaders who can think broadly and strategically, the hospital partnered with Harvard Business School, creating custom Executive Education programs and enrolling more than a dozen people in the Program for Leadership Development. Below, Mandell and Fenwick explain how PLD has catalyzed short-term and long-term change across the organization.

Q. What led you to seek executive education for your leaders?
Mandell: The future is going to involve challenges and opportunities we never thought about, and we need to be ready to adapt. About six years ago, we recognized that we would need people with a lot of new skills and experience. We had a very good training program internally, but it was clear that we also needed outside exposure.

Fenwick: We’ve built this institution into the best children’s hospital in the world. The question now is how we preserve our excellence while reinventing ourselves. Everyone’s leadership skills are going to be critical as we move forward. Through executive education, we are investing in our people’s growth and giving them new ways to participate in the institution’s future.

Q. How has your relationship with Harvard Business School evolved?
Mandell: Initially, we worked with HBS to create a custom Executive Education program specific to Children’s Hospital. The cream of our leadership—87 nursing professionals, physicians, and administrators—went to the HBS campus and lived and worked together in an intensive program where they were challenged to really think about how to develop a culture of patient safety and quality. That experience changed the organization dramatically.

Soon after that, two of our people attended the Program for Leadership Development (PLD). Based on their experience, we began to approach executive education as a formal, iterative program. We’ve now sent 14 people to PLD over a period of five or six years. Overall, 68 of our physicians have attended PLD or another HBS Executive Education program, and some have attended several programs.

“The culture of the organization is changing.”
James Mandell, MD

Q. How do physicians feel about attending a business program?
Fenwick: There was resistance at first, but people now see executive education, and particularly the HBS opportunity, as a benefit. This focus on executive education has been valuable for retaining talent, encouraging people to engage in a broader way, and addressing specific business challenges.

Q. How does PLD help physicians address the challenges they face as leaders?
Mandell: Very few of our physicians have had exposure to what I would call behavioral thinking or organizational thinking, or business competitive thinking. They have never had the opportunity to find out whether or not their opinions in realms outside medicine were very accurate. In PLD, our physicians participate alongside people from multiple countries, multiple backgrounds, and industries far outside medicine, and it really does broaden the way they think.
In PLD, our physicians have an opportunity to consider medicine as a business in a world of competition and increasing regulation. PLD is not designed to give answers to specific questions. It’s designed to make us resilient as an organization so we can adapt to whatever comes, while also prompting us to take the initiative in some areas and become game-changers.

**Q. What impact has PLD had on your emerging leaders—and on the institution as a whole?**

**Mandell:** I have seen changes in how individuals present themselves, how they work in a group, and how they try to influence opinions inside the organization. Others see them performing differently and begin to emulate that behavior, so it spreads throughout the institution. The culture of the organization is changing.

**Fenwick:** PLD is providing leaders throughout our organization with new skills and tools, new approaches to problem solving, lessons from other industries, and a common language that helps us approach our challenges collectively. It has been valuable for them to learn that health care shares challenges with many other industries, and that rather than reinventing the wheel, we can apply solutions that have worked elsewhere.

**Q. As chief executives, how do you weigh the costs and benefits of executive education?**

**Fenwick:** Executive education is an investment for everyone—from the participants to their supervisors and departments to the hospital as a whole. PLD has been universally beneficial to the participants and to the institution. The participants have come back with a new point of view, a stronger voice, a confidence in their ideas about how to approach problems and issues, and every one of them has created a project or a plan that has benefited the institution. I can clearly see the change and I will continue to make that investment.

**Q. What kind of organization would benefit from the kind of commitment you’ve made to educating your leaders through PLD?**

**Mandell:** I recommend it strongly for organizations in an industry like health care where changes occur every day, consolidations are taking place, and challenges are emerging both in the marketplace and on the regulatory side. With PLD, we’re growing and taking on new challenges, not only here but also across the country and internationally.

**Fenwick:** Making an investment in people—in current and future leaders—is probably the smartest thing any chief executive could do. I would absolutely encourage other organizations to make this kind of investment.

“PLD has been universally beneficial to the participants and to the institution.” Sandra L. Fenwick

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