

Laura is the associate director of a nonprofit agency that provides assistance to children and families. She is the head of a department that focuses on evaluating the skill-building programs the agency provides to families. She reports directly to the agency leadership. As a whole, the agency has been cautious in hiring this year because of increased competition for federal grant funding. However, they have also suffered high staff turnover. Two directors, three key research staff, and one staff person from the finance department have left.

Laura has a demanding schedule that requires frequent travel; however, she supervises two managers who in turn are responsible for five staff members each. Both managers have been appointed within the last six months.

**Manager 1:** Kelly has a specific background in research. She manages staff that provides research support to another department that delivers behavioral health services to youth. Kelly supports her staff and is very organized; however, she often takes a very black and white view of issues. Upper level leadership values Kelly's latest research on the therapeutic division's services. Kelly is very motivated and driven and expects the same from her staff.

**Manager 2:** Linda has a strong background in social science research and evaluation. She manages staff that work on different projects within the agency. She is known as a problem solver and is extremely supportive of her staff. She is very organized and has a wealth of experience in evaluation of family services. Linda is very capable and can sometimes take on too much.

The managers are sensing that staff is becoming overworked as everyone takes on increased responsibilities due to high staff turnover. Staff has also mentioned that Laura's "glass half-empty" conversation style leaves them feeling dejected. In addition, Laura has not shared budgets with her managers, so they are having difficulty appropriately allocating work to staff. Laura said she has not received sufficient information from the finance department to complete the budgets. The finance department said they have sent her all the information they have available.

As staff becomes distressed, the managers are becoming frustrated. They feel like they are unable to advocate for their staff or solve problems without key information like the departmental budget.

1. ***How can Laura most effectively use both management and leadership skills in her role as associate director? What combination of the two do you think would work best in this setting?***

*A director could be both a leader and manager. However, given that the two managers are very capable and directly manage all the department staff, Laura should focus on being a leader. She should delegate managerial responsibilities to the two managers. This strategy will build the managers' confidence, allowing them to solve problems for their staff. It will also free Laura to focus on building a greater sense of staff commitment to mission and vision.*

## 2. What steps could be taken to build staff confidence?

Staff seems uncertain about the future due to high turnover and Laura's negative conversation style. Building staff confidence could involve

3. Giving managers more autonomy and the needed information to manage their staff
4. Communicating regularly with staff about changes
5. Encouraging staff to pursue professional development and learning opportunities and providing time for them to do so
6. Engaging in team-building exercises and interactions
7. Incentivizing excellent performance
8. Addressing Laura's conversation style directly, explaining to her how it impacts staff perceptions
9. Involving staff in the hiring process where possible as team vacancies are filled
10. Talking to staff directly and without retribution about the issues they think contribute to high turnover

## 3. What advice would you give Laura on improving her leadership skills and to the managers on improving their management skills?

It might help for both Laura and the managers to take a personality or leadership/management assessment. This way the managers can ascertain their individual skills, learn how they can best support employees, and figure out how they can work together to use each other's strengths to run the department. Using a **style** approach, Manager 1 appears to utilize a task-oriented approach and Manager 2 demonstrates a relationship-oriented style. These two orientations could be structured to support one another.

Laura can focus on building leadership skills by building on her current strengths. In addition, Laura may want to revisit the roles and responsibilities of each position and how her division's work aligns with the overall organizational mission. Aligning with the overall mission and communicating it to staff may help improve morale and provide clarity on the department's role and direction.

## 4. Which leadership style do you think a leader would need to be effective in this situation?

Several leadership approaches may be suited to the position described in the scenario:

- **Skills:** Centers on the ability to solve complex problems. The nonprofit is having several difficulties at the organizational level, including high turnover.
- **Path Goal:** Motivates employees by defining goals, clarifying paths, removing obstacles, and providing support. This type of leadership may work well in building employee morale.
- **Transformational:** Treats employees as complete human beings, considers emotions and perspectives. Builds motivation by providing a clear vision, acting as a social architect, building trust, and positive self-regard.