

# Trustee Insights

## GOVERNANCE EFFECTIVENESS



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clinicians and non-clinicians to gain a different perspective and discuss challenges openly and honestly, while also learning leadership, mindset and communication skills. While not a panacea for burnout, it has been proposed that coaching is a [more effective solution than other well-being and burnout initiatives](#).

When offered through a digital online platform, coaching is scalable, measurable and accommodates various schedules and talent strategies targeting executives, non-clinicians and clinicians. Third-party coaching builds leadership capacity, mitigates burnout, fosters engaged teams and contributes to talent retention for the individual and the surrounding teams.

Despite the challenges facing the health care industry, it is possible to create a healthy, enjoyable workplace for health care workers and organizations. Board members can leverage their influence and community connections to support the vital role of coaching, highlighting its positive impact on clinicians' performance, professional growth and patient care, with evidence from medical studies supporting its significance.

Here are four reasons coaching should become an essential tool for health care systems:

## Why Health Care Organizations Need Third-party Coaching

### Leadership coaching can mitigate burnout and increase retention

BY SARAH MILBY

Organizations today are experiencing unprecedented levels of staff shortages, turnover, burnout and increased contracted labor expenses. According to the American Medical Association's survey, nearly one-quarter of the more than 9,000 physicians from various disciplines in the study and 40% of 2,301 nurses planned to exit their practice in the next two years. Departures on this scale will drive up costs and add stress to already financially strained organizations, drastically lower employee morale and exacerbate burnout for those who remain.

This alarming trend is largely driven by skyrocketing burnout rates, impacting clinicians, non-clinicians, staff and hospital executives. According to the [New England Journal of Medicine](#), more than half of health care clinicians report symptoms of burnout from increased workload, inadequate support and work culture, among other factors and other mental health challenges impacting their personal and professional lives.

Hospitals boards of every type have an important role to play in addressing these challenges by proactively working with their organization's leaders. One solution they can strive to implement is professional coaching, specifically third-party, digital leadership coaching.

Third-party coaching can provide psychological safety for executives,

## 1. Professional Growth and Leadership Development

A study published in the [Annals of Surgery](#) in 2023 examined the effects on women surgery residents of remote coaching for their professional development. The results were compelling: residents who received coaching showed improvement in aspects of well-being, relative to peers who did not receive coaching. Furthermore, coaching fostered a sense of self-efficacy and confidence among the residents, positively impacting their overall job satisfaction and career progression.

A similar study, “[The Impact of Leadership Coaching in an Australian Health care Setting](#),” found that coaching interventions significantly improved goal attainment, solution-focused thinking, leadership self-efficacy, perspective-taking capacity, self-insight and resilience and ambiguity tolerance.

## 2. Patient-Clinician Relationship

The well-being of the clinician has a direct correlation to patient outcomes. This idea is bolstered by a [study of nurses](#) who reported that issues such as longer hours and emotional exhaustion increased their feelings of burnout, leading to greater patient dissatisfaction. However, the reverse was also true: when their work environments and feelings of burnout improved, so did patient satisfaction.

Moreover, coaching can help clinicians enhance their communication skills, such as breaking bad news or discussing treatment options with patients and their families. In a recently [published study](#), coaching was found to be an effective

method for preparing clinicians to handle challenging discussions ethically and with empathy.

## 3. Retention

The health care workforce is diminishing while the demand for care is rising. The Association of American Medical Colleges projected in 2020 that physician demand will continue to grow faster than supply, leading to a shortage of between 37,800 and 124,000 physicians by 2034, with the most alarming gaps in primary care and rural communities. Retention or turnover is not just an issue from a clinical point of view but also from a cost standpoint for health care organizations. It is estimated that the organizational cost to replace a physician is \$500,000 to one million dollars due to recruitment, training and lost productivity, which does not account for any lost potential revenue during this period. Cleveland Clinic reports its coaching program had a very positive impact on addressing burnout, with more than 160 physicians who worked with a coach signaling the experience was a key factor in their decision to stay with the organization. Cleveland Clinic also estimates that this alone saved the organization \$84 million in physician retention.

## 4. Mitigating Burnout and Improving Well-being

A [study](#) published in *JAMA Internal Medicine* in 2019 examined the impact of coaching on physician well-being. The results showed that physicians who participated in a coaching program reported reduced burnout levels, lower stress and higher job satisfaction.

Coaching helped them develop resilience strategies to cope with the demands of their profession.

More evidence comes from a 2019 [Mayo Clinic study](#), where physicians who received six sessions of professional on-the-job coaching had a considerable reduction in emotional exhaustion and the various symptoms associated with physician burnout. Additionally, third-party coaching provides a confidential space for clinicians to discuss their challenges, frustrations and emotional struggles. In a profession where mental health is sometimes stigmatized, having a support system through coaching can be a vital component of self-care.

As the health care landscape continues to evolve, hospital boards should support and encourage the integration of coaching into clinician education as a priority. Third-party coaching is a powerful tool that can transform health care organizations by supporting professional growth, improving patient-clinician relationships, mitigating the effects of burnout and improving retention. Coaching is not merely important — it is indispensable for the future of health care.

It is time for hospital board members and every stakeholder to recognize the value of third-party coaching in health care and invest in its widespread adoption for the benefit of clinicians and the patients they serve.

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