



How the Birkman Method® Provides the
Language for Leadership Development
in Healthcare and Hospitals



“The nurse managers are able to build a language out of the Birkman. We can use it as a tool for common understanding.”

- Alison Lintner,
HR programs administrator
University of Texas Medical
Branch, Galveston

“The Birkman gives you the language and the vocabulary to be a better leader. It gives you a new way to talk about the issues.”

- Melissa Johnston,
director of the Leadership
Institute University of
Arkansas for Medical
Sciences

Today’s highly competitive healthcare environment is placing new demands on provider organizations and their leaders every day. As these organizations strive to excel in clinical quality, service and patient satisfaction, they need managers and leaders who can not only develop strategy and drive growth, but also motivate and inspire staff.

As the competition increases for top healthcare talent, the need to nurture the best people within an organization will become even more acute. Hospitals and healthcare organizations, large and small, need their people to be connected, caring and productive to succeed in the current American healthcare environment. Those identified as high-potential managers need to be trained to take on even greater leadership responsibilities.

In the past, healthcare providers were more focused on the mechanics of diagnosis and treatment than they were on opportunities to develop leadership skills. They typically recruited senior administrative leaders from a small outside pool or promoted from the physician ranks and sometimes selected candidates who may or may not have been prepared to manage-let alone to lead. That is no longer true. Healthcare organizations know that their current leaders need specialized training to reach their full potential, and their next generation of leaders must be identified and developed today. That’s why many healthcare organizations have internal leadership development initiatives and most of these use personality assessments to identify and cultivate the type of leadership qualities they want.

Management and leadership training authority Dr. Elaine La Monica Rigolosi has stressed the need to “observe, experience and carry out new behaviors in a safe environment” for those being readied for leadership and management.¹

Using the Birkman Method can help create a language of common understanding between leaders and those they lead

Alison Lintner, an HR programs administrator for the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, Texas, has used the Birkman Method with success at many different levels of UTMB. Currently, she uses it to develop leadership skills for more than 60 nurse managers in a regional maternal and children’s health program.

“The nurse managers are able to build a language out of the Birkman,” Lintner said. “We can use it as a tool for common understanding.”

Leadership qualities that make a difference in organizational performance can be found within individuals not previously tapped for leadership roles, and a personality assessment can often find these undiscovered leaders. After these high-potential individuals are identified, they can be trained well before they assume a leadership position. This kind of insight can make the difference between leadership success and failure.

Another healthcare organization that has used the Birkman personality assessment successfully at different levels is the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences. UAMS has two leadership initiatives-a Leadership Institute for director level and above and the Management Academy for frontline managers such as nurse managers and office managers. Melissa Johnston, director of the Leadership Institute at UAMS, believes that assessment is an essential part of the program.

“You need some kind of assessment,” Johnston said. “We base ours on questionnaires and interviews. You need to decide what qualities you want to nurture and design your curriculum around. Most of the issues we end up working on are communication, creativity and motivation.”

Personality assessments allow organizations to understand how personality traits mesh with specific job requirements and go beyond technical skills to look at how a person works with others. Used the right way, these assessments can build a bridge between capabilities and responsibilities by:

- Pinpointing the strengths and weaknesses of potential leaders and then using their strengths to address their weaknesses
- Revealing hidden assumptions, motivations or interpersonal styles that may be holding a person back from taking necessary risks for development
- Identifying which candidates are ready to be accepted as leaders in an organization and which candidates may need more experience before moving forward
- Discovering limitations in leadership development programs that hinder the development of leaders across the organization

“The Birkman gives you the language and the vocabulary to be a better leader,” Johnston said. “It gives you a new way to talk about the issues.”

¹ Rigolosi. *Management and Leadership in Nursing and Health Care: An Experiential Approach*, Springer 2005.

“If you use the [Birkman] systematically, it gives you a language where people can express themselves without putting someone on the defensive. It gives people permission to have a conversation.”

- Sue Retzlaff,
director of organizational development Methodist Hospital System, Houston

Using the Birkman Method to understand and manage needs

The best personality tests analyze and report the factors that drive and motivate leadership behavior. That ultimately defines individual needs—and an individual’s needs will drive actions and reactions.

When individuals’ needs are met, they exhibit behavior in positive and productive directions. When their needs aren’t met, this may create negative and unproductive behavior. Interpreting how this dynamic (that of needs) operates provides powerful insights into what drives people’s behaviors and their leadership capabilities.

Sue Retzlaff, director of organizational development for the Methodist Hospital System in Houston, has used the Birkman Method effectively to reveal the “needs dynamic” in personalities. Although the Methodist Hospital System also uses the Birkman Method for individual and career coaching, it is an important part of its leadership development process.

“We discuss how leaders and team members see themselves, how they see others and their needs, especially if they are very low or very high on certain scales,” Retzlaff said. “We want to point out how their needs may be different than those of their teammates. If they have any problem areas to watch out for, they can start working on those now.”

“The Birkman helps people we work with understand their stress mode behaviors and it allows them to do action-oriented things to get out of that behavior,” Retzlaff said. “The value is in the language. If you use the tool systematically, it gives you a language where people can express themselves without putting someone on the defensive. It gives people permission to have a conversation.”

By using personality testing to reveal and reinforce leadership potential, healthcare organizations can develop a blueprint for creating strong, capable – even transformational—leadership, wherever the capability is found in an organization.

Beyond the fundamentals of providing the language of leadership: the principles of transformational leadership

All successful healthcare organizations—for-profit, non-profit, and research—can enhance their ability to identify and develop leaders through effective use of the Birkman Method. Personality assessment is a key component of

developing transformational leaders—leaders who can inspire individuals to be their best and teams to achieve greatness. Whether leadership need is at the most commonplace level (such as a nurses’ shift manager) or at the highest level (such as CEO), identifying those high-potential individuals in advance and providing a sufficiently robust syllabus of development through mentoring, structured socialization and formal education/training programs is critical to success.²

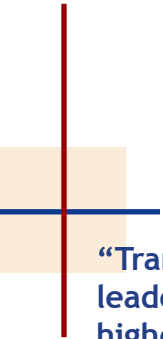
“Transformational leadership is the highest and most effective form of leading in most organizations,” said Dr. Larry G. Lee, senior director of research and development for Birkman International, Inc. “In a transformational leader, power and authority are centered in an ethical, rational leader who commands both trust and respect.”

Transformational leadership is built around four principles:

- **Inspirational Motivation:** These leaders are high-energy people who are able to link meaning to action and communicate the benefits in a meaningful way. Their followers respond with higher levels of attentiveness and dedication to reaching the goal.
- **Intellectual Stimulation:** These leaders promote intelligent and thoughtful problem-solving processes and use creativity and innovation to benefit the organization. They encourage others to imagine, accept, support and implement their good ideas.
- **Individual Consideration:** These leaders exhibit integrity and authenticity, two important traits in a successful organization. They define the needs of the group or team as a whole—at the “macro level”—then tailor their approach to resonate with each individual at the “micro level.”
- **Charisma:** These leaders clearly define issues and create a sense of social purpose. They are often less conventional and less accepting of traditional authority, but they are able to see and articulate what truly matters. Expressive, emotional and highly articulate, charismatic leaders command respect and are willing to take personal risks for the greater good.

² Andrew N. Garman and J. Larry Tyler. “Succession Planning Practices & Outcomes in U.S. Hospital Systems: Final Report.” The American College of Healthcare Executives August 2007.

These traits can be learned and enhanced at every level of an organization thanks to the Birkman Method that reveals and assesses individual strengths and weaknesses. Not every leader will excel in all four transformational leadership skills, but personality assessments can identify where potential leaders are strongest and weakest, pinpoint the hidden assumptions, as well as motivations or interpersonal styles that may inhibit growth and development.



“Transformational leadership is the highest and most effective form of leading...In a transformational leader, power and authority are centered in an ethical, rational leader who commands both trust and respect.”

- Dr. Larry G. Lee,
senior director of research
and development Birkman
International, Inc.

To learn more about the successful applications of the Birkman Method in healthcare organizations, more about transformational leadership, or just more about Birkman, visit www.birkman.com or email mwickliffe@birkman.com

About the Birkman Method®

Birkman International, Inc. is the provider of the industry-leading personality assessment that facilitates team building, executive coaching, leadership development, career management and interpersonal conflict resolution. For over 50 years, corporate human resources professionals, independent consultants, executive coaches, educational institutions and other not-for-profit organizations have used The Birkman Method® with over 2.5 million individuals. The Birkman Method® accurately measures productive behaviors, stress behaviors, underlying needs, motivations and organizational orientation.

Birkman International, Inc. | 3040 Post Oak Blvd. | Houston, Texas 77056 | Phone 713.623.2760
www.birkman.com