



Case: Generational Sensitivity in Leadership Transitions

Key Phrases:

- Generational Sensitivity
- Leadership Transitions
- Succession Planning
- Work/Family Boundaries
- Evaluating Work Ethic

Mark's Perspective:

Mark is a 40-year-old general surgeon who has served as the Assistant Residency Program Director for the past three years. He is an active clinician who is well liked and thought of by both residents and faculty. Melissa is the department's Residency Program Director. Having just turned 63, she's been in the department since her residency and has served as Program Director for over 20 years. She is a knowledgeable resource on ACGME residency requirements. Over the past several years, Melissa has shifted significant program responsibilities to other individuals to decrease her workload and prepare for a leadership transition. Melissa's strengths are in administrative leadership; clinically, with the guidance of the department's operating room director, she has narrowed her care to healthy, day-surgery patients undergoing minor procedures. She stopped her overnight call obligations when she turned 55.

Although Mark has been recruited to be Residency Program Director in other departments, the potential for the Director position within his own department has kept him here. Due to the recent significant losses in the stock market, Melissa has informed Mark that her earlier intent to retire at 65 has now been altered; she does not intend to retire for another 7 years, and plans to stay in the Director's position until then.

Melissa's Perspective:

Melissa was one of 20 women in her medical school class and was the only woman in her vascular surgery residency program. She is now well recognized as an outstanding vascular surgeon and remembers how hard it was to achieve this status. She decided early on in her career to remain single and not have a family, as she felt that she would not gain stature in her



field if she were not be available to come in for emergency cases at any hour of the day or night. Finally at age 55, she had stopped her overnight call so that she could develop a life outside of work. She enjoyed serving as residency director and especially enjoyed working with the increasing number of women in the field. She anticipated that she would maintain this position until her retirement. Melissa was always available to talk to residents whenever an issue arose, would often stay into the evening speaking with the residents, and was always available to talk with residents by phone from home at night and on weekends.

Mark has served as Assistant Residency Program Director, and Melissa has been happy to mentor and work with him. Mark had two young children and made it clear to the residents that his time away from work was his family time. Recently, Melissa has had the feeling that Mark was eyeing her job. She had an agreement with her chief that she would keep her position until retirement but was feeling uneasy about Mark. She felt that Mark could not do as good a job as she was doing with the residents since he did not share her work ethic.

Case Questions:

1. If you were Mark's developmental mentor, how might you approach this situation? If you were Melissa's mentor, how might you approach this situation?
2. What are the opportunities for Mark if Melissa stays on? What are other opportunities for Melissa if Mark is promoted into the Program Director position?
3. Is it possible for Mark to prove his work commitment to Melissa?