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# TEACHING TIPS

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## Role Modeling

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### HABITS ARE HABIT-FORMING

Did you know you are a role model to your trainees? Maybe you did not realize that learners are sifting through everything you say and do, inside and outside the patient care setting, “deciding” what parts of your behavior they will incorporate into their physician role. Observation learning, acquired from watching others and through experimentation, is the primary way trainees develop their clinical and interpersonal skills and habits.<sup>1</sup>

Have you personally observed and benefited from working with physicians who consistently demonstrated the best qualities of patient care, clinical judgment and professionalism? Chances are those physicians had some powerful role models and they have reflected carefully on the example they want others to see and emulate.

In your clinical practice, what behaviors are you modeling for your trainees? Do you encourage self-learning or do you micromanage the case? Do you model and teach work organization or do you reprimand for inadequacies? Do you demonstrate and talk through the steps in the procedure or remain quiet and take over when the trainee flounders? Do you include patients in your discussions or assume that the physician has all the pertinent information and that the patient has nothing to contribute?

The first step in becoming a positive role model entails recognizing your behavioral habits. Is your habit to empty others’ buckets or fill them up?<sup>2</sup> A moment of lost composure that translates into throwing an instrument (underhand or overhand, makes no difference!), snapping at a nurse or belittling a patient, reflects on you and may, ultimately, on the practices and habits of your trainees. Realize that your habits can be habit-forming for others. Set a good example, as “example is not the main thing in influencing others, it’s the only thing.”<sup>3</sup>

*Sources: <sup>1</sup>This teaching tip is developed from J. Friedland’s chapter “Social learning theory and development of clinical performances,” in Edwards JC, Friedland JA, Bing-You R (eds), Residents teaching skills, New York, Springer 2002, p.32. This revised book is an excellent resource and belongs on the medical teacher’s shelf*

*<sup>2</sup>Rath T, Clifton, DO. How full is your bucket? Positive strategies for work and life. New York: Gallup Press. 2004.*

*<sup>3</sup>Attributed to Albert Schweitzer, from J. Friedland’s chapter.*