

# Innovative Programs Teach New Parents Necessary Skills

BY RHODA WEISS

**A**t three hospitals across the country, marketing programs are helping new parents adjust to their changing roles. The following educational efforts bring parents to the facilities and teach them skills that will have long-reaching positive benefits for their families and communities.

## MEN TEACHING MEN AT BOOT CAMP

When Steve Maldonado became regional vice president for marketing at PeaceHealth in Longview, WA, little did he realize that part of his role would be to teach fathers how to handle their newborns. But in addition to his marketing responsibilities, Maldonado teaches "Boot Camp for New Dads," a unique workshop for new and soon-to-be fathers developed by Boot Camp for New Dads, a non-profit organization in Irvine, CA. One of a series of programs implemented by PeaceHealth to generate patients for PeaceHealth Medical Group, the program helps new fathers feel confident about bringing a new baby home.

Maldonado, himself a Boot Camp "veteran" and the father of three, and another father teach the free workshop, which covers not only baby care and fatherhood but also the needs of new mothers. Topics discussed include forming a new family, the changing role of fathers, and helping mothers breastfeed. Participants also share memories of their own fathers. Then the prospective dads have a hands-on opportunity to practice baby-care skills under the guidance of other fathers who have taken the course, who bring their new babies to class and demonstrate changing diapers, burping the baby, and swaddling. The program concludes with advice from the veteran dads to the rookies on such topics as coping with crying babies, bonding, adjusting work and family responsibilities, preventing accidents and injuries, and dealing with relatives.

"Men training men is a powerful formula for fatherhood success," says Maldonado. "Boot Camp veterans also benefit from the networking and support they receive when they return with



*Ms. Weiss is a Santa Monica, CA-based healthcare consultant and speaker.*

their babies at a subsequent workshop."

The program's curriculum is based on the experiences of Boot Camp veterans, who dispel a variety of myths that persist about new fathers.

"The primary concern of these men is not whether they will lose playtime with their buddies but the best way to support their mates, balance work and family responsibilities, and develop the patience required of new fathers," says Maldonado.

Boot Camp also helps create better fathers for families and communities that sorely need them. More than half the nation's children will spend at least some of their childhood without a father in the home. This can cause or aggravate social problems, including gang violence, teen pregnancy, domestic abuse, and crime.

However, 90 percent of the nation's fathers are present at their child's birth, and Boot Camp's mission is to help them get connected and positively involved so they remain a strong and constructive force throughout their children's lives.

## BABY UNIVERSITY

For parents who want to major in parenting, St. John's Health System in Anderson, IN, offers Baby University, a free day-long program designed to educate new and expectant parents about child development, birth, and baby care.

Begun in 1997 to market St. John's new birthing center, which opened a year earlier, the program is well attended. "About 100 people attend the event each year, and we have received very positive comments on our evaluations," says St. John's vice president of corporate communications Marlene Carey.

Baby University day begins with registration, when class schedules are distributed and a light breakfast is served. An orientation session briefly outlines the day and includes the presentation, "How to Play and Have Fun with Your Baby." Students can choose up to six classes from a list of 12. Classes include "Baby Care 101" (safety and

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## COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

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CPR), "Genetics 101" (What will my baby look like?), "Diet and Health 101" (nutrition and feeding through age one), "Fiction and Facts 202" (old wives' tales), "Dorm Life" (decorating the nursery), "Mid-Terms" (fetal development), and "Final Exams" (birth and anesthesia). "Family Science" explains ways to adjust after the baby is born, and "Introduction to Management" advises fathers on child care. To reach the "Dean's List," participants learn ways to instill character in their children, while "Campus Health Services" details childhood illnesses and disease. Finally, "Spring Break" wraps up the day with a tour of the birthing center.

Classes are taught by doctors, nurses, and other staff who specialize in obstetrics and childbirth education. In addition, local vendors display the latest in baby supplies.

### THE NEWBORN CHANNEL

At Holy Cross Hospital in Silver Spring, MD, the Newborn Channel is the latest form of maternity education. This closed-circuit satellite television network delivers continuous postpartum and newborn educational programming in both English and Spanish.

Updated annually, the channel broadcasts on television sets in the labor and delivery, postpartum, and antepartum areas; the obstetrics clinic; and the pediatrics department. Patients receive a programming guide and can watch any or all of the programs at convenient times.

The programs cover a wide range of topics, including infant CPR and rescue breathing, automobile safety, and what to expect during the first 48 hours after delivery.

"The channel is one more way to reinforce maternity education provided to patients during their stay at Holy Cross Hospital," says Eileen Cahill, director of corporate affairs and marketing. □

☎ For more information, contact Steve Maldonado at 360-636-4111; Marlene Carey at 765-646-8290; and Eileen Cahill at 301-754-7130. Boot Camp for New Dads can be contacted at 949-786-3146 or through its Web site, [www.newdads.com](http://www.newdads.com).

## FINAL SAY

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That does not mean change should be easy. It is entirely appropriate for leaders to turn people upside down and inside out—using these opportunities to generate real growth and insights out of the chaos. A leader's job is to challenge employees, inspiring, motivating, and pushing them to be far more than they imagined they could.

### • Lead by quiet, consistent example.

Jesus was a servant leader in the truest sense. He worked to enable others to see the vision, make it their own, and create ways to realize the vision from their own perspective.

Following his example means leading by spending time with employees and standing beside them in the line of fire. It means being inclusive rather than exclusive, accessible rather than intimidating. It means creating a culture of openness and trust, a safe place for creativity and risk-taking. It means approaching leadership with a great sense of humility.

### • Be human.

Jesus fully experienced what it means to be human, with the accompanying fears, imperfections, pains, and doubts. Although he had a hearty sense of humor, he was sometimes sad, and he acknowledged his sadness.

Leaders need to give themselves permission to be imperfect, to be human. Likewise, they can invite the people in their organizations to take chances, to fail in creative attempts to realize the organization's vision. Jesus would also want leaders to take care of themselves. It is almost impossible to inspire—to lead—when one is overwhelmed and without physical, emotional, and spiritual reserves.

### • Never attempt to do it alone.

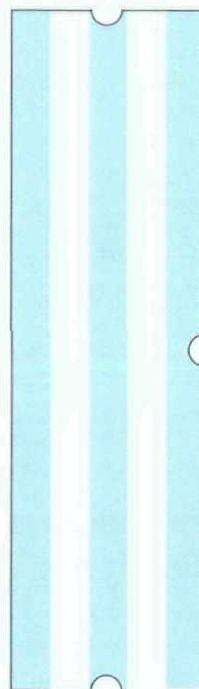
Jesus kept his balance through prayer, reflection, and community. In times of fear, he reached out to his father and those around him for comfort and support. "I am not alone," he often said.

Leaders need not be alone, either. They can ask God to accompany them on their journey. By trusting in God, pursuing a mission, and remaining true to core values and beliefs, it is possible to gain the strength to lead an organization bravely, and to succeed. □

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