

A Marketing Pathway for the Next Generation of Radiology Leaders

By Kim Kelley FRBMA

Early in your career, it's easy to think leadership is something that happens later, after a title change, a bigger team, or a seat at the executive table. After more than two decades in radiology marketing, I can confidently say this: leadership isn't a destination. It's a series of intentional choices made long before the promotion ever arrives.

For young professionals and emerging leaders in radiology marketing, the pathway forward is both exciting and complex. The industry is evolving quickly. Technology, artificial intelligence (AI), and hybrid work environments are reshaping how we communicate, collaborate, and build trust. At the same time, the core fundamentals of leadership, curiosity, accountability, relationship-building, and vision, remain unchanged.

This article is meant to be inspirational, yes, but also grounded in reality. There's no shortcut to leadership, and there's no single "right" path. However, there are patterns I've seen repeatedly among marketers who grow into influential, trusted leaders.

Start With the Bigger Question: Who Do You Want to Be?

Before you focus on skills, software, or certifications, take a step back and ask yourself a deceptively simple question: What do I truly want to accomplish in my career? Or, more playfully, who do you want to be when you grow up?

Leadership in radiology marketing isn't just about executing campaigns or managing vendors. It's about understanding

the role radiology plays in patient care, advocating for your organization's value, and connecting the dots between strategy, experience, and outcomes. The most successful leaders I know have a clear sense of purpose long before they have formal authority.

Mentors and leaders can help here by encouraging younger professionals to think beyond their current job descriptions. Career development conversations shouldn't focus only on next year's goals, but also on long-term aspirations and personal values.

Master the Fundamentals Before Chasing the Next Trend

Marketing in radiology requires a deep understanding of services, audiences, and messaging. Emerging leaders sometimes feel pressure to jump straight into advanced tools or trendy tactics. While innovation matters, leadership credibility is built on fundamentals.

Know your services. Understand how patients move through the system. Learn what referring providers value and where friction exists. Strong leaders can translate complex clinical capabilities into meaningful benefits, without oversimplifying or overpromising.

This foundation becomes even more critical as AI tools enter the picture. AI can enhance efficiency, insight, and personalization, but it cannot replace strategic thinking or ethical judgment. Tomorrow's leaders must know how to use AI responsibly, ask the right questions, and recognize its limitations.



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Leadership in a Hybrid, Digital-First World

Hybrid work environments and digital communication are here to stay. While they offer flexibility and efficiency, they also demand stronger intentionality. Leadership presence doesn't happen automatically through email or messaging platforms; it must be cultivated.

Emerging leaders should focus on clarity, consistency, and follow-through. Be known as someone who communicates thoughtfully, meets deadlines, and respects others' time. These habits matter just as much as technical skills.

For mentors and managers, this means modeling healthy digital leadership, setting boundaries, prioritizing meaningful collaboration, and ensuring younger professionals feel seen

and supported, even when teams aren't in the same room.

Relationships Still Matter, More Than Ever

Despite all the technology shaping our work, leadership in radiology marketing remains deeply human. Relationships with colleagues, providers, vendors, and professional peers are the backbone of long-term success.

My own career has been shaped by networking, public speaking, writing, and volunteering, especially through my involvement with the Radiology Business Management Association. Showing up consistently, contributing thoughtfully, and being willing to help without immediate return are leadership behaviors in action.

Leadership Habits to Start Now



Leadership doesn't begin with a title, it begins with habits. For young professionals and emerging leaders in radiology marketing, these behaviors can accelerate growth long before formal authority arrives.

Get Curious on Purpose

Ask why things are done the way they are. Learn how radiology services impact patient care, operations, and revenue. Curiosity builds context, and context builds credibility.

Learn to Translate, Not Just Execute

Strong leaders don't just complete tasks, they explain why those tasks matter. Practice turning data, technology, and services into stories that leadership can understand.

Build Relationships Before You Need Them

Networking isn't transactional. Invest time in relationships with colleagues, providers, vendors, and peers early. Trust compounds over time.

Be Reliable in Small Things

Meeting deadlines, following through, and communicating clearly may seem basic, but consistency is a leadership signal others notice quickly.

Embrace Technology, But Stay Human

AI and digital tools are powerful, but leadership still requires empathy, judgment, and ethics. Use technology to enhance connection, not replace it.

Seek Feedback Without Defensiveness

Growth happens fastest when feedback is welcomed. Ask for it. Listen carefully. Apply what's useful and let the rest go.

Own Your Development

Don't wait for permission to grow. Volunteer. Write. Speak. Join committees. Leadership momentum comes from action, not approval.

For young professionals, professional associations, committees, and speaking opportunities provide invaluable exposure and confidence-building. For established leaders, creating space for emerging voices and encouraging them to step forward can be transformational.

Growth Requires Ownership, Not Permission

One of the most important lessons I've learned is that leadership development is not something you wait to be given. The most effective leaders take ownership of their growth. They ask questions. They seek feedback. They stay curious.

That curiosity becomes a competitive advantage in a rapidly evolving field. Whether it's learning how AI-driven analytics inform strategy or understanding how patient expectations are shifting, continuous learning separates stagnant careers from meaningful ones.

Mentors can support this by offering guidance without micro-management, allowing emerging leaders to stretch, make mistakes, and build confidence through experience.

Looking Ahead: What Tomorrow's Leaders Will Need

The next generation of radiology marketing leaders will need to balance innovation with integrity. They'll need to be comfortable with data and technology while remaining grounded in empathy and communication. They'll need to lead teams that may never work in the same physical space and still foster trust and alignment.

Most importantly, they'll need to remember that leadership isn't defined by a title. It's defined by impact.

Whether you're just starting out or guiding someone else along the way, leadership in the making begins now, with intention, curiosity, and a willingness to grow. ■



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