

A COMMUNITY

FIRST

By Steve Priest

“A community first, and a company second”—an interesting choice of words to describe a \$6 billion Fortune 400 organization with 35,000 teammates (employees) across the United States, but an even more interesting choice of words 10 years ago when that same organization was effectively bankrupt and on the verge of collapse.

★ The DaVita Village is guided by a learning and development philosophy that truly places its people at the top of the list.

Steve Priest
*Chief Wisdom Officer and
Senior Vice President of Operations*



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In the past 10 years, this phrase has been brought to life by individual leaders believing and behaving in a way that brings a deep set of humanistic values to life while sustaining healthy business performance. Welcome to our community, DaVita Inc. We are the largest independent provider of kidney care services in the United States, providing life-sustaining care for more than 120,000 dialysis patients at more than 1,500 dialysis clinics and in more than 800 hospitals.

In 1999, when Kent Thiry joined DaVita (then called Total Renal Care) as the new CEO, the company was in trouble. After a period of aggressive growth, the operating infrastructure could not support the organization, and cash was scarce.

Struggling to make payroll and needing to focus on the difficult challenges of turning around the business, Kent (often referred to as the mayor of the DaVita Village), and other leaders such as Joe Mello (our first chief operating officer) and Doug Vlchek (also known as “Yoda” and our first chief wisdom officer) had a bigger vision—to create a special place for our teammates, the patients we care for, the physicians we work with, and the communities in which we live. We call this “the DaVita Village,” a place where we care for each other, sacrifice for each other, support each other, and together, create meaning in our work and in our lives.

While a dramatic business turnaround was taking place, there was something more exciting going on. DaVita, meaning “giving life” in Italian, was born with teammates coming together to rename the company through a democratic process. Teammates rallied around a mission (to be the provider, partner, and employer of choice) and selected seven core values (service excellence, integrity, team, continuous improvement, accountability, fulfillment, and fun) to guide them as we embarked on a quest “to build the greatest dialysis company the world has ever seen.”

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★ **The DaVita way**

Recognizing the need to help our teammates develop both personally and professionally was an important early step in our success. We believe in the premise that our beliefs drive our behaviors, which drive our results.

By following this premise, we have developed our training approach that is uniquely focused on our teammates’ beliefs first. Leadership starts with a very personal accounting into one’s own belief and values system, and if those systems are honorable and steadfast, they will lead to behaviors that ultimately result in clinical and business excellence.

At DaVita, we strive to do things “the DaVita way”—with the full engagement of our heads, hearts, and hands in the work we do. Why? Quite simply, it is the right thing to do for a care-giving company. Developing human beings’ emotional intelligence and self-awareness is critical to great leadership and great teams.

Dialysis is an intense, time-consuming process by which we are literally saving peoples’ lives. Being able to come from a place of compassion and deep commitment to service is critical for the job. Accordingly, learning about compassion and

emotions are built into our educational curriculum. More compassion naturally equals better patient care.

★ **DaVita University**

So how do you take these concepts and make them real and tangible for thousands of teammates, patients, physicians, and families? This is where the DaVita wisdom team and our award-winning training and education provider—The DaVita University—come into play.

Our wisdom team is charged with lighting the way for our teammates so that they can shine. Using the DaVita University as our vehicle, we developed a comprehensive multi-disciplinary training approach that provides extensive education and gives our teammates the tools and resources needed to be successful in their jobs and in their lives. And like any great community, the education and quality of life of its citizens are paramount at DaVita. We are committed to the personal and professional development of all citizens of our Village. In fact, we invest millions of dollars every year to support the personal and professional development of our teammates.

★ **Focusing on the whole person**

Our mayor often reminds us that management is a business skill, but leadership is a human skill. So through the DaVita University, we provide educational programs to develop our teammates holistically. Not only do we

have a full set of clinical competency trainings to provide our teammates with the necessary skills to provide great patient care, as well as IT, compliance, and business-area-specific training available in classroom and e-learning formats, we also provide our teammates with a curriculum of learning that includes people skills such as: conflict resolution, team building, effective communications, and emotional intelligence feedback to name a few.

Fundamentally, we believe that helping our teammates to become better human beings will create a ripple effect that extends to our patients, other DaVita teammates, and the world around us. People spend a large portion of their lives at work, so it makes sense that work is where the majority of our personal growth occurs. Work helps shape our identities, and it is where we often overcome limiting beliefs and personal challenges. In doing so, we learn about ourselves and how our interactions with other human beings help shape society as a whole.

A comprehensive curriculum

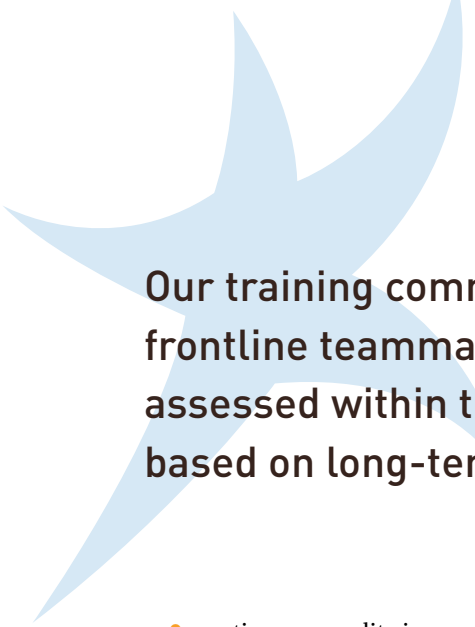
Our training commitment is to all members of the Village, from frontline teammates to senior executives. As training needs are assessed within the Village, solutions are developed and delivered based on long-term impact. We also measure the effectiveness of initiatives according to business goals, strategies, and predetermined metrics. As the need for programs is uncovered, metrics are created to measure success in adding value to the organization. We see ourselves truly as partners to the clients we serve, and our curriculum is driven by the needs that arise from it.

Our comprehensive educational curriculum represents an extensive commitment to personal and professional growth and includes (but certainly is not limited to) the following:

- DaVita Academy—a two-day “enculturation” program that more than 32,000 DaVita teammates have attended

- DaVita Way of Managing (DWOM)—a four-day course designed for new managers focused on the skills needed in their new role managing teammates
- DaVita Way of Team (DWOT)—a three-day program designed for the entire team focused on team dynamics and the growth of interpersonal relationships
- DaVita Way of Leading (DWOL)—a four-day program for those who have completed DWOM that moves beyond managing and focuses on the human skill of leading people
- facility administrator survival training (FAST)—frontline supervisor development that focuses on providing newly promoted supervisors with the skills needed to transition to a new leadership role
- reality 101—training leaders in the basics of dialysis care including technical training as well as working in a dialysis clinic for two to three days to gain an understanding of the work that our frontline teammates do everyday
- clinical training—specific training needed by our teammates to provide the clinical care needed by our patients
- career counseling—includes performance development reviews and internship programs
- certifications—vital to the quality of care, especially in an industry regulated by state and federal agencies
- communications skills—includes multiple levels of Myers-Briggs-type indicators and DiSC personal profiles
- customer service—includes a course on “Eyes of the Customer” and an 18-module program on telephone skills
- diversity—with nearly half of our teammates identifying themselves as non-Caucasian, we are deeply committed to diversity training
- employee orientation—“One for all” is the mantra of one of the most famous teams ever committed to a mission, the Muskateers, and also is the name of the DaVita teammate orientation experience
- job rotation—provides teammates from director to senior executive level with an in-depth, hands-on understanding of the demanding job of frontline teammates and results in more effective and empathetic leadership
- leadership development and executive coaching—improving leadership capabilities through self-discovery, skill-building, performance management, and strategic thinking
- mentoring—facilitates cross-pollination of potential leaders and knowledge sharing between field groups and corporate offices
- remedial skills training—an interactive, hands-on workshop led by clinical experts and used to enhance the competency of in-clinic caregivers

Thanks to innovations in technology, we are coming up with more and more ways to reach teammates. One way of reaching more teammates while increasing efficiency and reducing costs is through blended learning. We are constantly leveraging our online learning management system to get training to the remote corners of the Village.



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- continuous quality improvement—a four-phase, teammate-friendly process that features project groups working collaboratively to examine their environments and make improvements.

★ Continuous improvement and the future of training at DaVita

Although we already provide an extensive spectrum of educational courses, we are always focused on living our core value of continuous improvement so that we can deliver the optimal development opportunities to our fellow teammates. An important component of continuous improvement is understanding the effects of each program offered. This means finding meaningful metrics to guide us in the development and operation of our learning experiences.

For all of our offerings, we use a comprehensive evaluation process designed to measure everything from the value of the specific content to the effectiveness of the teacher, to whether or not the training session included an appropriate level of service excellence for the attendees, to the quality of the food served. We want to know that everything is done in a first class way and, if not, to pinpoint exactly where improvements are needed.

In addition, we focus on measuring our teammates' engagement both pre- and postattendance at DaVita University courses through the use of engagement surveys that we have developed throughout the years. For our leadership trainings, such as DWOM, we have tried several approaches, including

comprehensive Level 3 and 4 Kirkpatrick evaluations.

But now, we are doing something far simpler and more practical—representative of the DaVita way of doing things—by checking in with a participant's supervisor to see if his behavior has changed and if he has implemented his post-class goals. For our DWOT program, which focuses on collaboration and team behaviors, we do pre-session and post-session measurements of key business and clinical metrics, and overall the results have been extremely positive.

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We are beginning to pull some of our instructor-led courses into the virtual world by partnering with vendors for an online book abstract library, as well as a system that supports goal planning and skill building after our DWOM class, which further integrates learning. We also are exploring the other educational vehicles for reaching people, such as using WebEx and field-certified trainers.

★ The bottom line

A community first, and a company second—the foundation of our DaVita Village. DaVita does dialysis, but we are not about dialysis. We are about the

lives of our teammates, our patients, our physicians, and our communities. If we add value to their lives, they will add value to the lives of others.

Our mayor often reminds us that “this is not a dress rehearsal, this is our life,” so our approach to training is based on helping each teammate reach her maximum potential and live her life fully each and every day. When this happens, the Village lives.

Steve Priest is chief wisdom officer and senior vice president of operations at DaVita. He oversees the award-winning DaVita University (DVU) training and leadership-development programs and is also responsible for operations throughout the Southeastern United States; steve.priest@davita.com.

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