EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN HEALTHCARE

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Employee engagement is all the rage. Why? Because the benefits of having engaged workers are immense. In the healthcare industry, specifically, one of the best ways to drive clinical excellence and improve the patient experience is to ensure that your employees are engaged. Engaged employees provide better patient care, stay longer at their organization, make fewer mistakes, and are great ambassadors for your organization’s brand.

When employees are engaged, they trust senior leaders and feel an emotional connection to your organization, which causes them to go above and beyond the call of duty and give you a lot of discretionary effort. So how do you inspire healthcare employees to get off the sidelines and into the game?

The good news is there’s a cure to the global employee disengagement crisis, and it’s not difficult to implement. To crack the code of employee disengagement, you must create and execute an employee engagement strategy. And while 90 percent of senior leaders think it’s important to have an engagement strategy, only 25 percent have one. Do you?

Once your strategy is created, you can begin executing it immediately.

In this healthcare–focused edition of TD at Work, we’ll break down the global employee disengagement epidemic in detail. You’ll soon understand:

- the changes taking place in the healthcare industry and their impact on employee engagement
- the benefits of engaging employees
- who should own employee engagement in your workplace
- leadership traits that drive employee engagement
- a proven four-step process to turn disengaged workers into a unified high-performing team
- the path forward—or your next steps.

Let’s get started today helping you create an extraordinary culture in your organization that will benefit your employees, patients, board members, community, and reputation tomorrow and for decades to come.

**WHAT HEALTHCARE ENGAGEMENT LOOKS LIKE**

Jerry Stone writes in a blog post on MedicalGPS that an engaged healthcare employee:

- makes eye contact with patients, genuinely smiles, and welcomes them
- escorts patients to where they need to be or helps family members find their loved ones
- truly listens to patients without acting rushed
- answers patient questions about medications and discharge orders
- conducts rounds on patients one last time before their shift is ended
- always remembers to wash their hands
- puts their patients first.

Stone also points out that several studies have shown employee engagement is one of the top variables correlating to mortality, complications, accidents on the job, patient safety, clinical outcomes, staff turnover, and absenteeism. Further, Towers Watson’s research shows that when healthcare employees are engaged, patient care and patient satisfaction scores improve, government reimbursements increase, and patients engage in their treatment plan.

In the face of all this powerful data, healthcare organizations are still falling behind. It’s clear that employee engagement is a challenge for many U.S. healthcare providers when you consider that:

- 56 percent of healthcare workers are disengaged
- 43 percent of these disengaged workers are seeking other employment options.

Although the healthcare industry numbers are better than the overall employee disengagement scores for all industries (87 percent of global workers are disengaged, according to Gallup’s 2012 State of the Global Workplace Report), it’s still alarming that more than half of healthcare
employees sleepwalk through their day, putting time but no energy, creativity, or passion into their job.

This is especially significant when you take into consideration that these employees are serving patients who are ill. Those patients could be our parents, children, or other loved ones.

WHEN EMPLOYEES ARE ENGAGED, THEY TRUST SENIOR LEADERS AND FEEL AN EMOTIONAL CONNECTION TO YOUR ORGANIZATION, WHICH CAUSES THEM TO GO ABOVE AND BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY AND GIVE YOU A LOT OF DISCRETIONARY EFFORT.

CHANGE: A CONSTANT IN HEALTHCARE TODAY

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) is an American federal law signed by former President Barack Obama on March 23, 2010. Its formal name is the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, and it often is referred to as Obamacare.

The ACA has brought massive change to the healthcare industry. The current U.S. administration, led by President Donald Trump, has vowed to repeal the measure, which means the healthcare industry may see even more transformation in the future. In the meantime, the industry—and its clients—remains unclear as to what the future holds.

Current healthcare reform legislation puts a spotlight on patient satisfaction, provider preventable conditions, and readmission rates. It also ties a system’s Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements to the quality of the services it provides, in an effort to ensure a high-quality patient experience. In his 2016 Forbes article, “The ROI of Employee Engagement in Healthcare,” Kevin Kruse writes that “the federal government recently cut Medicare payments to 721 hospitals—totaling $371 million—which had unacceptable high rates of hospital-acquired conditions, and fined 2,610 hospitals for having too many readmissions.”

Needless to say, these new ACA regulations have the potential to negatively impact your bottom line unless you put a strategy in place to improve employee engagement. Why is it so important to increase engagement? Because there is a direct correlation between employee satisfaction/engagement and patient satisfaction/engagement.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTHS OF ENGAGED HEALTH ORGANIZATIONS

What can we learn from these recent cuts in Medicaid payments? Healthcare is about people, and your organization is only as good as the people it employs and the people it retains. You can hire the best and brightest employees in the healthcare industry, but if they choose to leave because they don’t trust leadership or feel an emotional connection to your organization, your patients and your revenue may suffer. A great way to ensure you win the war for talent and retain your employees is to re-engage them.

In Kruse’s Forbes article, he reports that Gallup’s work with the most highly engaged healthcare organizations reveals four strengths that set these groups apart from their peers as they weather the changes in their industry:

- **Clear and open communication across the organization.** Leaders of top healthcare systems communicate the need for change as it relates first to the overall business and second to every individual within the organization. Creating buy-in at the managerial level is crucial, as is allowing employees to be integral to the change process by actively eliciting their feedback. This information and communication strategy should help allay employees’ fears of the future and keep them from leaving.

- **A well-articulated mission and purpose that is consistent with the organization’s culture.** The beliefs top management wants to build into its purpose statement must be demonstrated in practice. To make the guidelines effective, executives and leaders at all levels should articulate the company’s
philosophy, relate it to actual situations and problems at hand, and point out to associates where their actions align with the beliefs of the organization.

- **A clear commitment from leadership to create great workplaces.** The best organizations know how to establish emotional commitments with their employees to create an environment where people love their work. Engaging employees is their top priority because they know that engagement drives better business outcomes.

- **A strong commitment to the community.** Community engagement makes the hospital a stakeholder in the health and wellness of its local communities while building patient confidence in the healthcare provider. This strategy allows employees to live their mission by supporting the health and wellness of their communities, and it allows community members to see evidence that the healthcare organization values patient outcomes. These factors are key components in creating a competitive advantage.

Change is one constant in the healthcare industry. Another constant? The direct correlation between employee engagement/satisfaction and patient engagement/satisfaction.

The mission of healthcare organizations is to serve patients, often at very stressful times in their lives. Delivering high-quality and compassionate care is crucial. So what does that have to do with employee engagement? A lot. Engaged employees drive the patient experience.

When you have a negative experience in an electronics store, it's annoying. But when you have a negative experience in the healthcare arena, that's something completely different. It's the responsibility of senior leaders to ensure that employees are engaged, so that they do indeed provide the highest level of service to patients and make the stressful experience of seeking healthcare as positive as it can be.

By now, you should be able to see the need to ensure your employees are engaged, which in some cases means re-engaging employees who have already checked out. So where do you begin? Your journey starts with ownership of employee engagement, because you will not succeed on your employee engagement journey if your senior leaders and managers do not champion and engage in the strategy.

Who Owns Employee Engagement?


So what role does each of these stakeholders play, and how do they work together when it comes to engagement? Here are a few guidelines to keep in mind:

- **Senior leaders must engage in your employee engagement strategy.**

- **HR does not own culture on its own.**

- **Managers are responsible for executing on your employee engagement strategy.**

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**HEALTHCARE IS ABOUT PEOPLE, AND YOUR ORGANIZATION IS ONLY AS GOOD AS THE PEOPLE IT EMPLOYS AND THE PEOPLE IT RETAINS.**

**THE CORRELATION BETWEEN EMPLOYEE AND PATIENT ENGAGEMENT**

As already mentioned, when healthcare employees are engaged, it improves clinical excellence, patient care, and patient experience; increases government reimbursements; boosts patients’ willingness to return to your facility; and encourages patients to engage in their treatment plan. This makes sense because we know engaged workers go above and beyond the call of duty, give more discretionary effort, are more creative than their disengaged counterparts, and provide the highest levels of customer service.

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