



Rekindling the Spirit: Staff Engagement 2.1

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As a chief nurse executive, I find I'm easily pulled away from my passion and my reasons for entering the nursing profession. Most days when I am working in a corporate office, or am out on the road for meetings –my focus is on organizational and system issues, rather than the day-to-day reality of most of my provider colleagues. Yet, based on my belief that the best talent gives the best client care, I decided it was time to re-connect with staff in the field – and I am so glad I did!

Employee engagement is the emotional commitment that employees have for their organization and its goals. This means that engaged employees care about their work and their company, which is different from just being happy at work or having job satisfaction. Engaged employees don't work only for a paycheck, or the next promotion, but to help achieve the organization's vision. This commitment leads to higher quality, productivity and ultimately, greater customer satisfaction (Kruse 2014).

Employee engagement is typically based on six factors: quality of life, company practices, total rewards, opportunities, people and work. Further, it is impossible for an employee to be engaged without communication and connection – after all, we are in the relationship business. Effective and engaging communication resonates with the employee in rationally, emotionally and behaviourally relevant ways. This means that messages from leadership – about business objectives, changes that are occurring and what is required of employees – need to “put the employee at the centre of the story” (Aon Hewitt 2012).

Today nurse leaders in hospitals or long-term care facilities have some advantage in that they are able to walk to care units or areas where staff congregate, although this too is changing with the merging of facilities many now include multi sites. In the community setting, connecting with staff poses unique challenges, because

staff are geographically dispersed and highly mobile. Finding the time to reach out during days packed with meetings and administrative duties is difficult. So how does today's nursing leader reach out to engage staff?... By taking a good old-fashioned road trip, of course, and utilizing social media to share information and engage staff along the way!

My "road trip" series consisted of visits to multiple service delivery centres across our national organization. Meetings were held with the leadership team within each centre, healthcare providers in the field and clients and their families. At one site, the leadership team talked about the challenges and unique opportunities of integrating inter-professional care, while at another, a leader gave time for each of her staff to talk about "the good, the bad and the ugly." Such an inspiring way to let staff celebrate what was going well and define steps that could be taken to address challenges.

I was also able to join a personal support worker (PSW) team meeting, where the focus was on person-centred care. The group came up with a fabulous acronym to define what person-centred care meant to them: Truthful, Respectful, Understanding, Sensitive, Tender loving care (TRUST). I loved their perspective and rich discussion about clients' individuality, culture and wishes, and their own need to take a holistic view of what happens in the home environment. I shared these thoughts and ideas through Twitter, which allowed me to engage not only with the staff I was meeting at that moment, but also with staff across the organization. This made the experience much more fruitful, as new ideas and thoughts were shared with many through social media.

I also had the good fortune of spending time with staff in the community, as I headed out on home visits. It was a meaningful experience to be a guest in clients' homes, and the visits gave me an opportunity to see first-hand how our staff and family caregivers are taking on significant roles to keep loved ones at home. A registered nurse and I made a visit to a client who was between chemo treatments. I was able to see best practice guidelines for pain management being applied, and how staff creatively manage complex client situations. This opportunity provided excellent insight into how our employees practice, what we need to create to support them and what works or what doesn't. In fact, many suggestions and ideas came from the staff during home visits as to how we could improve our processes, systems and even our education.

Why is all this so important? Well, it really brought home for me how the concept of “nothing about me without me” should be applied, not only to our clients but also to our healthcare employees. Seeing first-hand how our nurses, therapists and PSWs navigate through the processes we have created, utilize the documentation tools and client education materials, and manage the technology we have designed, it struck me that we should be engaging our employees much more in decision-making and in the co-creation of supports and resources that have such a significant impact on their daily work lives. Yet it occurred to me that for the most part, we are not very good at asking them what they need and how they want it.

The good news is that today communicating and engaging with staff is so much easier with the use of technology and social media such as Twitter and Facebook. As well, there are platforms such as Soapbox that can assist us in getting employees’ input in a meaningful way, and new video conferencing technology, including Scopia and WebEx that allows leaders to connect with staff from anywhere.

So, from time to time it is important for us to revisit our roots, remind ourselves why we are here and strive to engage with our staff in new ways. A PSW I met during my road trip shared what was meaningful and important about her job, saying that providing a great client experience was really all about “going in happy and choosing to bring joy to people’s lives.” Little did she know how much joy she brought to mine... enough to rekindle the passion!

References

- Aon Hewitt. 2012. *2012 Trends in Global Employee Engagement*. Retrieved February 27, 2014. <http://www.aon.com/attachments/human-capital-consulting/2012_TrendsInGlobalEngagement_Final_v11.pdf>.
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