

Eliminating the Buzz

Working Towards Building Healthy Teams and the Impact on Customer Experience

by Patrick Vaca

Project Overview

Working with a Nursing leadership team, we chose the Drexler Sibbett Strategic Visioning model as our framework to address unsatisfactory customer experience scores while simultaneously addressing its underlying issue of staff feeling excluded from change processes. Although the work was uncomfortable, we had a team willing to look at their part in the process and establish a strong commitment to creating a healthy environment. The goal of implementing the Strategic Visioning model in the emergency department was expected to create an increased awareness of self, improve teammate engagement, and lead to improved patient satisfaction.

Vision

To empower our teammates to actively participate in creating the optimal work environment that mirrors the care and compassion afforded to patients and families we serve: To create an environment where care of self and care of team is felt and embodied by each teammate so that “show the love” is an extension of the appreciation of self and team.

Improvement Process

At the beginning of 2016, this small rural hospital emergency department had embarked on its second full year of serving their rural community. Patient volumes had increased and the reality of ineffective systems was impacting the culture. The Emergency Department team was feeling the strain and internal relationships were becoming unhealthy. Teammates were exhibiting frustration with one another, and ineffective processes were creating barriers to patient care. The atmosphere could be described as a “quiet buzz ready to explode”.

We started with a current state assessment that identified some deep feelings of hurt and mistrust. Statements related to perception of fragmented teamwork, feelings associated with lack of decision making, and ineffective communication were acknowledged. We quickly realized that we needed to engage our charge nurses and teammates in the processes that positively impact their personal and professional practice.

The leadership team committed to acknowledging direct feedback from their teammates to identify and understand the foundational elements needed to create a ‘healing’ space for teammates to develop a healthier culture. By using anecdotal data and determining components of the true vision, the leadership team engaged their colleagues in deep brainstorming sessions of next steps in the journey.

All staff attended a 3-hour interactive training focused on effective communication, empathy, and the importance of self-care. Foundational components of effective leadership were introduced and reinforced as the basis for optimal patient care. All these efforts worked to support the teammates’ abilities to be more present for the patients and families they serve.

As trust began to be re-established, we continued to invite topics chosen by teammates to build competencies. We began to implement monthly trainings for the nurse leadership team on topics such as empathy, empowerment, effective leadership, and models of conflict resolution to build a foundation of

confidence and leadership competence. Each meeting was introduced with a former patient invited to speak as a “connect to purpose”.

The leadership team became more strategic in all interactions with teammates focusing on bright spots and what is working well. These interactions brought solutions that were process focused. This information was used as foundational work to remove barriers. This feedback was instrumental as we established commitments from our teammates to identify and create a healthy environment where each person was accountable for his/her own actions that support the new culture. Based on increased empowerment, the emergency department charge nurse team developed an action plan for strategically implementing this work among all shifts.

Charge nurses as leaders were expected to model and share these competencies during their assigned shifts to influence their teammates to enhance positive teammate and patient interactions. The Unit Based Council was re-established to be a catalyst for problem solving and ensure recognition efforts were in place for internal recognition and to support teammates as well. As a support to the work, the Unit Based Council created a monthly departmental spotlight to invite teammates to learn and appreciate one another’s efforts.

Bi-weekly emails focused on continuing to create awareness around self. Such topics as self-care and listening with heart were used to establish a continuous foundation of care of self and of teammates, while impacting the care of patients and families.

Evidence/Outcomes:

Due to the implementation of Strategic Visioning, this Emergency Department made progress in patient experience scores and witnessed a dramatic improvement in the engagement of their teammates. RN engagement scores rose to 4.48, among the highest in an organization of 23 emergency departments. They ranked highest performing Emergency Department (Top decile) of Q3 and Q4 of the corresponding year by Press Ganey and Associates.

Within a 9-month period, the Emergency Department developed and implemented several process changes to deepen the relationships that have been formed. Process changes range from the introduction of thank you cards to bedside shift report. The innovative measures were designed to strengthen relationships among teammates, advance the positive working culture, and keep to their true north mission of improving the health status of the county they serve. Their shift in culture has transformed the nursing team from one who focuses on tasks and staffing to a culture that supports the well-being of the employee to create a seamless experience for the customers they serve.

About the Author

Patrick Vaca has over 25 years of experience in people development and systems thinking. Having created several successful start-up programs, served in executive leadership positions, and worked as an internal consultant for large agencies, he has vast experience in leadership and corporate cultures, with a focus on goal attainment and developing personal mastery. His extensive body of leadership work (team performance, change management, effective communication and influence) and a clinical psychology background lend to his ability to help others gain insight into patterns of behavior not otherwise recognized.

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