BUILDING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT:
HOW TO IMPROVE EMPLOYEE RETENTION AND INCREASE PATIENT SATISFACTION
Healthcare employees often feel overworked and underappreciated, which can have a negative effect on patient care and satisfaction. When patient’s lives are on the line, it’s critical to recruit and retain engaged employees.

Engaged employees are more committed to, and enthusiastic about working at, your organization. Strengthening engagement levels leads to happier employees who are satisfied with their jobs and stay longer, which leads to better patient care and satisfaction. That’s why it’s important to hire great talent and create ongoing engagement.

The Advisory Board Company found that 20% of all hospital employees are either disengaged or ambivalent, while 40% are merely content.¹ This guide will show you how to strengthen your engagement levels throughout your relationship with each employee.
BENEFITS OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Before we get into how to strengthen employee engagement, let’s first discuss why it’s important.
Increased Employee Satisfaction and Retention

Healthcare employment is growing quickly, but the number of qualified professionals to fill those jobs is not. The competition for healthcare workers gives dissatisfied employees plenty of opportunities to find a new role.

This has become particularly apparent with nurses. By 2020, it’s been predicted that there will be a shortage of 1 million nurses in the United States. Nurses know they are in demand and won’t stay at an organization when they’re dissatisfied. In fact, 17% of nurses leave during their first year on the job and 31% leave by the second year, costing $36,000-48,000 per RN.

Organizations with talent management best practices experience 21% higher retention. Engaged employees feel more connected to their jobs, improving their satisfaction and decreasing turnover.
Improved Patient Care and Satisfaction

Engaged employees will go the extra mile to provide great quality care, while disengaged employees may do the bare minimum just to get through the day. Every employee in your organization, from your physicians and nurses to your cafeteria workers and janitors, can make a difference in your patient’s satisfaction—for better or for worse. In fact, communication with nurses has more impact on a patient’s hospital rating than how well their pain is controlled.\(^6\)

When 85% of engaged employees display a genuinely caring attitude toward patients, while only 38% of disengaged employees do,\(^7\) an engaged employee can be the key to high quality care and patient satisfaction.
Improved Employer Brand and Candidate Quality

As employee and patient satisfaction improves, your employer brand—or the way candidates perceive your organization—will improve as well. The Advisory Board Company found that excellent care was the second highest employee engagement driver. People would rather work in an organization with happy employees and patients—so you will have your choice of top candidates when it’s time to hire.

This will become increasingly important over the next few years. As healthcare demand continues to grow, so will the demand for qualified talent. Healthcare organizations will be competing for the same talent pool, but a strong employer brand can help you stand out as an employer of choice.
Increased Profit

Engaged employees and satisfied patients will also directly impact your bottom line. With better patient care, you will see shorter hospital stays, fewer malpractice suits and lower recruitment costs. Organizations that utilize best practices in talent management also experience 9% higher HCAHPS scores.⁹

For each 1% increase in employee engagement, the Advisory Board saw a 0.33% increase in HCAHPS Overall Hospital Rating, and a 0.25% increase in HCAHPS Willingness to Recommend.¹⁰

When patient satisfaction and HCAHPS scores are directly tied to revenue, happy patients can increase profits for your organization.
SETTING THE STAGE FOR ENGAGEMENT

First impressions set the stage for employee engagement, so it’s important to engage your employees **before** they even start working at your organization.
Choosing Leaders

There’s a saying in the HR world: “People don’t leave companies. They leave people.” Hiring and developing great leaders is a critical component of employee engagement because people who like working with their supervisor will feel more connected to your organization.

Leadership assessments can help you identify promising leaders, while training can develop them into stronger people managers. Your leaders will directly impact engagement through effective communication with employees, facilitating a positive work environment and recognizing when employees aren’t engaged. In short, they will be responsible for keeping your employees happy and engaged.

Without the right leaders in place, an employee engagement strategy may fall flat.
Recruiting for Cultural Fit

Candidates who are aligned with your mission, vision and values are more likely to be satisfied on the job and less likely to leave. The Advisory Board found that believing in the organization’s mission was the highest employee engagement driver. Behavioral assessments will help you identify candidates with qualities that match your community’s culture and are therefore most likely to succeed, and be happy, in your organization.

Candidates who are a strong cultural fit can strengthen their connection to your organization through the interview process, so pay close attention to the candidate experience. Peer interviews are a great way to ensure a strong mutual fit and to deepen the relationship between the candidate and your organization.
Onboarding

The first 90 days for a new hire are crucial for employee engagement, beginning with the onboarding process. This is a time to set expectations with your new hire.

The first order of business is to get sign-off on the job description. Review it together in detail so your new hire knows exactly what they’re responsible for and what’s expected of them. It’s important for your new hire to understand what they’ll be evaluated on so there aren’t any surprises later—this will provide a better work experience and keep your employees motivated.

Next, set goals with your new hires. Employee goals should align with those of the organization to reinforce how the employee’s work supports the organization’s mission, vision, and values. With clearly defined goals, employees know how to prioritize their tasks and how their success will be measured. This makes performance management more than a once per year event because employees and their managers can measure and improve their performance on an ongoing basis, leading to better job satisfaction. When employees know what it takes to succeed from day one, they will be happier and more engaged.
CONTINUOUSLY BUILDING ENGAGEMENT

Employee engagement is not a one-and-done deal. Employers must have a strategy in place to continue to build upon it throughout each employee’s tenure with their organization.
Providing Feedback

Many organizations understand the importance of annual performance management reviews to provide feedback to employees, review compensation and discuss career goals. These are not only an opportunity to gauge your employee’s engagement, but also to increase it. Managers should use a performance management system to record both positive and constructive feedback throughout the year so annual reviews don’t solely depend on their recent memory.

Some organizations are now performing 360-degree reviews instead of, or in addition to, employee performance reviews with hiring managers to give more comprehensive feedback. A 360-degree review includes peer reviews from colleagues and subordinates, as well as the employee’s manager, to look at performance from a different perspective.
While annual reviews are important for employee performance management, they should not be the only time an employee receives feedback. Feedback should be given regularly to show appreciation for things the employee is doing well, and to identify areas for improvement. This may come in the form of **employee rounding**, in which managers schedule time to meet with employees each month, or through teachable moments where managers provide feedback in the moment they see the behavior.
Recognizing a Job Well Done

Recognition for a job well done is a powerful way to provide feedback and improve employee engagement. 73% of engaged employees said their organization recognizes them for excellent work, compared to 52% of unengaged employees. Particularly with the daily stresses of working in a healthcare setting, a small gesture of appreciation can go a long way to remind the employee why they work in healthcare. Recognition comes in many forms and may be as simple as a verbal acknowledgement or handwritten thank you note, or more formal like a luncheon or financial reward.
Mentoring and Coaching

Feedback on an employee’s areas for improvement should always be presented as an opportunity for growth. Rather than simply discussing performance issues, managers can build engagement by coaching employees to improve their skill sets. By helping them set goals, and mentoring them toward success, employees will be motivated to reach their full potential. They will also appreciate your organization’s investment in them and may be inclined to stay longer. And, of course, your patients will benefit from the higher quality of care that comes with your employee’s professional development.
Professional Development and Learning

Formal learning and development programs can also help your employees reach their full potential and feel more invested in your organization. Develop an employee development plan from day one, and revisit it regularly. Online training programs can provide continuing education credits to keep your employee’s certifications up to date, or to help them earn new ones. Nurses, for example, can take courses to advance their associate degree into a bachelor’s degree. Investing in your employee’s education helps them perform their job better and grow as a healthcare professional.

This will become increasingly important as healthcare organizations implement new technology. Highly skilled workers will be needed to utilize new medical technology, as well as back office technology. Training an existing employee to move into a new role may be easier than recruiting these highly sought-after professionals.
Succession Planning

Employees who feel that they have a future with your organization are more likely to be engaged. When they have something to work toward, they will be more motivated to improve their performance and exceed expectations.

Succession planning should be discussed with your employees regularly to ensure that feedback, coaching, and professional development are tailored toward the employee’s current role, as well as their plan for the future. By laying out a clear career path for your employees and helping them reach it, you will demonstrate your commitment to them.
Compensation Management

Healthcare work can be as stressful as it is rewarding, and one of the best ways to show employees you value them is to compensate them fairly. If people don’t feel that they’re being paid fairly, they will be unhappy and leave.

You can reduce pay-based turnover and retain talent by staying competitive within the local and national job markets. A compensation market data solution can show you appropriate pay rates for varying factors, such as location, role, experience and company size. When you pay your employees a competitive wage, they are less likely to look for another job elsewhere.
MEASURING SUCCESS

Employee engagement should be an ongoing process where you continually measure your results and improve your strategy.
Survey Employees

A great way to measure your employee engagement is to survey your employees. An anonymous survey can show you how engaged your employees are overall, and where there may be room for improvement.

Ask for employee feedback on your recognition programs, management team, learning programs, compensation, and any other areas you’re focusing on.
Monitor HCAHPS Scores

Carefully monitor your HCAHPS scores, not just from a revenue perspective, but also as an indication of employee engagement. Engaged employees often provide a better quality of care and your scores should reflect that. As your employee engagement increases, so should your HCAHPS scores. If scores aren’t improving, you may have a disengaged workforce.
Develop Recommendations for Improvement

Measuring your employee engagement levels should give you an indication of what’s working, and where you have the biggest room for improvement. The management team should meet with each department to review the survey results and develop an action plan to address any issues.

You may find that some issues are department-specific, such as a bad manager, but that others are organization-wide, like low compensation. Devise a plan to improve these issues and continue to measure and track your progress. There will always be room for improvement, so celebrate each win as you reap the benefits of improved employee engagement.
Investing time and resources on employee engagement is a worthwhile effort that will increase employee satisfaction, decrease turnover, improve your employment brand and directly impact revenue. But, most importantly, it will increase your organization’s quality of care and patient satisfaction.

Employee engagement hinges on finding the right people, helping them reach their potential, and treating them like valued members of your team. Keeping them happy and satisfied in their roles will allow them to focus on their reason for working in healthcare: helping people.

Learn more about the HealthcareSource Quality Talent Suite™

Schedule a Conversation
REFERENCES

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