

CREATE A POSITIVE CULTURE FOR STAFF



How to establish a healthy practice environment that satisfies staff.

BY DAVIS JOHNSON

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

—Maya Angelou

What a simple yet powerful message from American poet Maya Angelou. This "how-you-made-people-feel" perspective can significantly shape behavior and interactions in a practice, especially when applied to how you treat your staff.

As a leader, knowing how staff members feel about working for your practice is a must. If staff genuinely enjoys what they do, studies show that they're more likely to deliver exceptional service, which will be a benefit to the overall success of your practice. An exceptional customer service experience will increase the likelihood that patients will return to the practice and tell others about their experience. As a result, an increase in patient recruitment, conversion, and retention typically occurs.

THE APPROACH: SEVEN KEY ELEMENTS

Creating an environment where employees look forward to coming to work—and regularly provide great customer service—starts with culture. The right culture sets the tone of the practice and influences how staff members treat and interact with one another. Further, it influences employee satisfaction, motivation, and productivity. Below are a few proven ways to establish a healthy work culture.

1. DEFINE CORE VALUES

Culture is built upon a group's beliefs, values, attitudes, and knowledge. As a result, to create your practice culture, you need to first define your values by writing down adjectives and phrases that best identify and reflect your perspective. For instance, do you value a casual, noncompetitive

business environment, or a strict, competitive one? If you are intentional and deliberate in identifying the key characteristics you want to foster, they will ultimately shape the behavior that's exhibited in the office. To increase long-term buy-in from everyone, get the entire staff involved instead of doing it alone or with just a few key leaders.

2. CRAFT A MEANINGFUL MISSION STATEMENT

Creating a useful mission statement is the next step in establishing a culture foundation. Sometimes called a vision statement, it's the why behind all decisions and actions made. It can be as simple as a single sentence, but it should be written to accurately reflect your core values. By creating a mission statement and identifying your core values, all the decisions you and your staff make moving forward become that much easier and clearer. Why? Because every decision made, every action taken, is guided by your core values and mission statement.

3. INSPIRE STAFF WITH SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Nothing is more effective in encouraging certain behavior among staff than practice leaders exhibiting it on a daily basis. It is so much easier to implement permanent, positive behavior when stereotypical examples of management are replaced by real leadership. Truly inspirational leadership is exhibited when individuals follow the practice's core

BOTTOM LINE

Empower employees to make their own decisions within the parameters of their job to signal to them that you trust and believe in them to make good decisions. Employees with appropriate autonomy are happier and more satisfied with their work than ones who are micromanaged.

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values, are willing to admit mistakes, applaud others, and get down in the trenches to contribute as needed. Staff members will take note of these instances and follow the lead of management.

4. LEVERAGE STAFF'S STRONGEST SKILLS

Placing every employee in the right position is essential in creating a happy and harmonious practice environment. To determine placement, consider and weigh each employee's skill set, strengths, and temperament. If there is an employee not in the right position, don't be afraid to transition that individual into another role where he or she can excel. An employee in the right role will be happier, as will those who work closely with the individual. When everyone is in the right role, the practice can run efficiently without much interpersonal drama or friction going on behind the scenes.

5. EMPOWER STAFF

To create and nurture a healthy work environment, be sure to promote an atmosphere that allows employees to make their own decisions within the parameters of their job. This empowers employees and signals to them that you trust and believe in them to make good decisions. It also gives them more freedom and self-actualization in their role. Employees

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6. INTEGRATE STAFF TRAINING

People are the No. 1 asset of your business, so be sure to reinvest in them. Ongoing staff training is not only vital in order to achieve stellar patient experience, but to make employees feel that there are growth and advancement opportunities within the practice. It also signals to them that they are important and worthy members of the team. Staff training can be carried out on your own, or you can also reach out to others to help (such as market industry leaders or your top vendors/manufacturers). Whatever way you decide to conduct training, know that the undertaking is worth it.

7. ACKNOWLEDGE SUCCESS BY CELEBRATING YOUR TEAM

Positive reinforcement is arguably the most powerful and effective personnel tool at your disposal. Acknowledgement can be a simple mention at the next staff meeting or a handwritten note of thanks. Fun outings, cutting a workday short, or planning group activities, such as a team dinner, can also resonate. Find out what rewards each employee prefers to make acknowledgments personal and truly meaningful. Acknowledgements such as these help reinforce desired behavior and make your staff feel valued and appreciated.

CLEAR BENEFITS

Your staff clearly benefits when a healthy work environment is created at your practice, and so do your patients. When staff enjoy what they do, turnover decreases and patient satisfaction quickly becomes the No. 1 priority. As a result, patient recruitment, conversion, and retention all increase. And, by the way, how much more fun is coming to work for everyone on your team when they enjoy what they do and the practice culture? ■

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