

Creating a Workplace Culture that places priorities on patients!

If we truly want excellent health care services in New Brunswick, we must stop comparing ourselves to ourselves and look to organizations that have consistent, great reputations for service excellence. Look to Mayo Clinic, Kaiser Permanente and others who excel. New Brunswickers are paying for excellence; we must demand that it is provided consistently.

What are the successful organizations doing that we are not doing consistently? Answer: The care of our people.

“Customers will never love a company until the employees love it first.”

– Simon Sinek, author, *Start with Why*

Quality health care service has little to do with buildings; it has everything to do with the human beings who provide the service: doctors, nurses, technologists, support staff, accounting....actually over 200 different job classifications are involved.

Each person comes to the workplace from a different training program, value system, cultures. Some come with their lives perfectly put together. Others come laden with debt, marital problems, stress issues, illnesses in the family, and children at risk. Some come to work while living through strained or abusive relationships. In short, the healthcare workforce is simply a microcosm of society.

The skilled managers and leaders must understand those various backgrounds and ensure that the organization does all in its power to help employees be everything they can be, to maximize their potential. This is not to say that the employer should be involved in the personal lives of its employees, but it is to say that skilled and compassionate managers need to be trained to be sensitive so that the many unspoken signals seen in day to day management are not missed.

Then when signals are seen, the manager needs to know that there are resources available to help the individual through whatever is the distraction.

In conventional practice, health care organizations often have deferred to large systems that claim to be able to help with employee challenges.

Often such “off site services” are accessed through an 800 phone number in which the employee is dealing, be it for family crisis or sick time, with someone hundreds or thousands of miles away. Part of conventional belief has been that service providers need to be board certified counselors, psychologists, social workers. Those credentials are essential in certain circumstances.

But evidence has shown through several workplace culture programs that what is needed initially is a caring, compassionate person trained in a recognized program that helps employees sort out, for themselves, the issues in their lives that manifest on the job.

One such program is HeartMath in which employees are invited to work through a simple but effective and brief process of interaction with a skilled facilitator with a view to identifying all that is happening in their lives that impact on their stress and distress.

Ken McGeorge, BS,DHA,CHE is a career health care executive and now consulting, based in Fredericton, NB, Canada. Please visit www.KenMcGeorge.com to learn more.

This process is working very effectively for Mayo Clinic, Kaiser Permanente, and many other superb health organizations.

Through such a confidential process, workers in several health organizations in NB have been helped very significantly with testimonials suggesting life-changing discovery. What surprises most employees is that they have not been totally aware of the various issues in their lives that are creating stress, distress, sometimes even dysfunction. When these elements are clearly brought to their attention through a thoughtful process, often they are surprised, then exceptionally pleased.

Over 80% of participants in three trials in NB report vastly improved emotional state and readiness for work within one month of entering the process.

Getting people totally mentally fit to do their jobs in health care represents a major step toward improving the workplace atmosphere and, we would argue, the quality of work performed.

There are many risks involved in being treated in a health care institution. While professional training is typically exemplary and professionals graduate with great skills, attitude and atmosphere have been shown to play a huge role in quality. Many of the great institutions Maimonides Geriatric Centre, Lahey Clinic, Cleveland Clinic, Mt. Sinai Hospital, and Loch Lomond Geriatric Centre all attest to the power of culture and workplace atmosphere.

So if we want excellent services that serve to attract and retain great staff, maintaining an excellent workplace Culture is not an option; it is essential. And the key to great culture is how you care for staff, be they janitorial, food service, nurses, or physicians.

So where do we start? It all starts, in NB, in the Premier's office since that office appoints the leaders. Then the governing boards and management need to be subjected to intense re-education.

Culture is not taught as a curriculum subject per se in Health Administration training programs so some external talent must be engaged with new training tools.

Signing on with an organization such as Planetree would fast-track the culture process since they come with a clear path that is tried and tested.

Prior to any of those steps, however, a serious process of meaningful consultation must take place to set the stage. Most typical government consultations are not meaningful by nature, so this must be different and managed with great sensitivity and conviction.

Following the consultation process, some serious conversations need to take place with key personnel, during which the commitment to culture change is outlined, the meaning of culture change is specified, and people are given the opportunity to commit to the change or find another source of employment.

What are the outcomes of workplace culture reform? We can expect reduced employee absenteeism, reduced turnover, reduced Worksafe claims, professional pride, reduced rate of errors, improved cleanliness. The public will know!

Ken McGeorge,BS,DHA,CHE

Retired health services executive and TJ columnist

Barb Fletcher, career civil servant, former Executive Director, Nursing Home Services Branch, Personal Wellness Coach

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