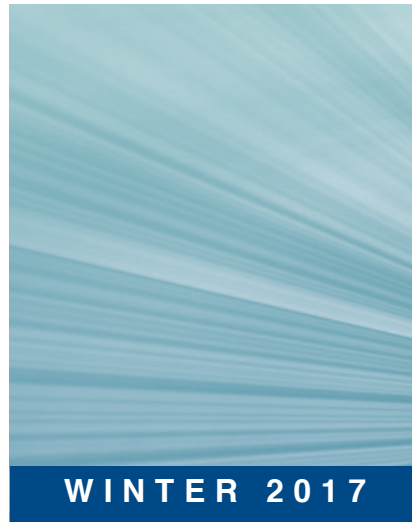


SPECIAL ISSUE

brief



Addressing The Staffing Crisis

DRIVE OUTCOMES THROUGH CULTURE

By Denise Boudreau-Scott, LNHA, MHA

**AMERICAN
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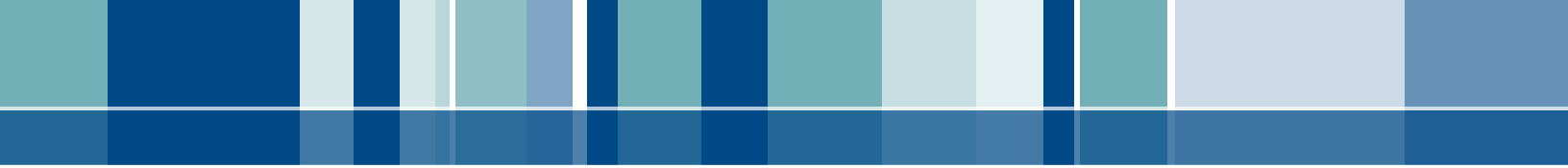
Living Longer Better





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Addressing The Staffing Crisis

DRIVE OUTCOMES THROUGH CULTURE

INTRODUCTION

Solving the complex staffing problem requires the involvement of stakeholders and providers like you!

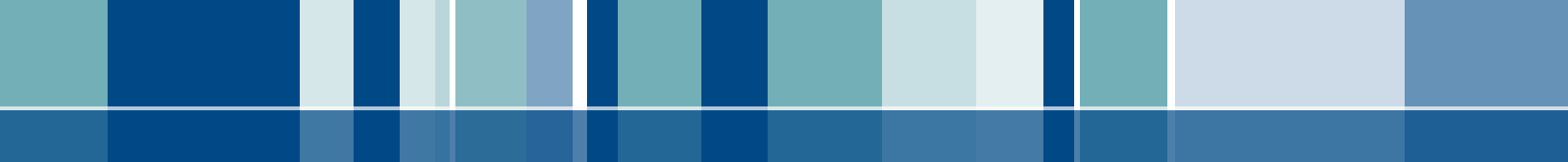
Delaying move-in's because there are not enough staff members to provide care. Struggling with persistent customer service issues because any warm body is hired. Reading online reviews posted from dissatisfied customers and staff. These are just some of the possible consequences of the staffing crisis that is currently plaguing aging service providers.

The quality of staff is perhaps the leading indicator of a provider's growth and sustainability. As the staffing crisis in aging services, already at unprecedented proportions, continues to grow, the concern about attracting and retaining not only a warm body, but the best people, is rising. The Bureau of Labor Statistics¹ estimates that the need for additional staff is great, with huge gaps in the number of personal care aides (580,000), home health aides (424,400) and nursing assistants (312,200) required in the next ten years. Unfortunately, there is no hope offered by a shrinking ratio of elders to the population group,² women 25-50, that provide most of the hands-on work in the field.

Inadequate government funding and regulatory challenges only exacerbate the problems of a field that is not considered the most attractive industry to work. Hiring and keeping remarkable front line staff is only part of the issue. Attracting or developing top-notch leaders continues to be a predicament that has considerable implications for the staff and resident experience, as well as the bottom line.

¹ <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/ecopro.t05.htm>

² http://newoldage.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/02/26/a-shortage-of-caregivers/?_r=1



Solving the complex staffing problem requires the involvement of a variety of stakeholders, including providers and you, but does that mean sitting back and waiting for a panacea to arrive? Hardly! While waiting for a potential policy response and solution, if and when it comes, there is something that can be done to dull some of the blow of the staffing crisis: create a culture where people want to come to work. Depending on the current culture in your organization, that may seem like a pipedream. But it's a goal worth pursuing because having a highly engaging workplace is one of the biggest competitive advantages your organization can have.

Each and every day employees are taking actions and making choices that are impacting the overall success of your organization. What they are choosing to do, or not do, during these moments is influenced by their intrinsic motivations and by the culture they are working in. The bottom line is they can set your organization up for positive outcomes, or place at risk.

Most leaders would say that engagement is important to organizational outcomes. But are their actions supporting these words? Consider the data that your organization collects and analyzes regarding census. Daily it is reviewed, and perhaps even multiple times a day. Compare this to the data that is collected and analyzed regarding your turnover and employee satisfaction. Is this information even collected in your organization? If so, consider how it is utilized. If census was consistently 10% lower than budget an immediate action plan for improvement would be demanded from the leader at that community. If it didn't improve, heads would roll! Is the same true for turnover or satisfaction? Usually these numbers are quickly reviewed, a few excuses are made and the reports are tucked away until next year.

ENGAGEMENT

Finding, retaining, and engaging talented team members is the single most important key to building a high quality, profitable senior living organization. While the focus has long been on creating the right framework of policies and training to meet operational, financial and clinical goals, more and more providers are recognizing the significant impact that the quality of their employees is having on these outcomes.

Employee engagement isn't just about making employees "happy". Engagement is committed employees that want to do the best work possible for their own personal fulfillment and for the betterment of the organization.

WHY ENGAGEMENT MATTERS

One of the universal barriers to engaging the workforce of any aging services provider is a lack of buy-in for engagement in the first place. Some leaders label it as touchy feely topic and lament, "People get a paycheck. Isn't that enough? Now we have to make sure they are happy?" But the hard data to support this soft subject is significant.

Gallup's 2016 Q¹² Meta-Analysis, in which 1,882,131 employees participated, compares employee attitudes with safety, customer attitudes, financials, employee retention, absenteeism, and quality metrics.³ What they have found consistently, across all business types, is that there is a positive relationship between employee attitudes and a variety of business outcomes.

Comparing organizations with employee engagement in the top quartile with the bottom quartile, Gallup found that those in the top enjoy the following outcomes with a median percentage difference of:

- 10% in customer loyalty/engagement
- 21% in profitability
- 17% higher productivity
- 24% in turnover for high-turnover companies (those with more than 40% annualized turnover)
- 59% in turnover for low-turnover companies (those with less than 40% annualized turnover)
- 70% in employee safety incidents
- 58% in patient safety incidents
- 41% in absenteeism
- 40% in quality

³ Gallup. The Relationship Between Engagement at Work and Organizational Outcomes. April 2016.

In the most recent published turnover data, AHCA's 2013 Annual Quality Report shared that average staff turnover continues to exceed 40% across all positions, with slightly higher rates for direct care staff.⁴ Considering Gallup's findings above, there is the opportunity to decrease turnover 24% when organizations move from low to high employee engagement.

Why is this important? Besides the ability to have enough hands on deck for superior customer service and an improved quality of life for residents, studies suggest that high staff turnover is linked with lower quality and even increased deficiencies in the skilled setting.⁵ Lower quality leads to a poor reputation with consumers, and in the skilled nursing environment can impact the coveted 5 star rating.

Staff Turnover in AHCA SNF Members

	2011	2012	2013
All Staff	45.1%	45.2%	40.6%
Direct Care Staff	50.0%	51.4%	44.4%
RN	50.0%	50.0%	44.4%
LPN	36.8%	37.5%	30.8%
CNA	51.9%	52.4%	45.8%

Turnover is also expensive: recruitment, interviewing, training, shift coverage and lower initial productivity means the cost to replace a position can be 25% or more of the annual salary. In addition to turnover, retention of staff, specifically licensed nurses, has been found to have an impact on rehospitalization rates.⁶ This in turn impacts referrals from hospitals that are looking to partner with those providers who have the lowest rehospitalization rates, which ultimately leads to dips in census.

Beyond the clear financial impact of engaged employees described above, research from The Commonwealth Fund⁷ found that providers focused on person-centered care, which is based in a resident-focused, highly empowered workforce, show the following benefits:

- 3% higher occupancy
- \$11.43 increase per patient day
- 14.6% reduction in survey deficiencies

⁴ https://www.ahcanal.org/qualityreport/documents/ahca_2013qr_online.pdf

⁵ http://research.upjohn.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1267&context=up_workingpapers

⁶ The Gerontologist Vol. 53, No. 2, 211–221

⁷ <http://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/fund-reports/2008/may/culture-change-in-nursing-homes—how-far-have-we-come--findings-from-the-commonwealth-fund-2007-nati>

Leaders, including direct supervisors, have a significant impact on retention and recruitment of the best talent. Providers can no longer afford to think of an engaged workforce as an appealing goal, but essential for improving the resident experience, customer service, quality, and financial outcomes. Attracting the right people, keeping them, and inspiring them to perform at their highest level is not only a nicety in today's world, it's a necessity.

BUILDING ENGAGEMENT

To build engagement in your organization there must be a focus on it. This seems simple, but many providers question the value of embarking on a journey to strengthen organizational culture. Given the business case detailed above and the staffing crisis looming over the field, providers are faced with a choice: focus on employee engagement or be left behind.

Most senior providers experience strong engagement occasionally – during a tough survey when members pull together, when the community receives special recognition for excellence or accomplishment, or after a particularly difficult challenge has been overcome. But what if this experience was something that happened every day? What if this commitment to one another was built in to the very DNA of the organization?

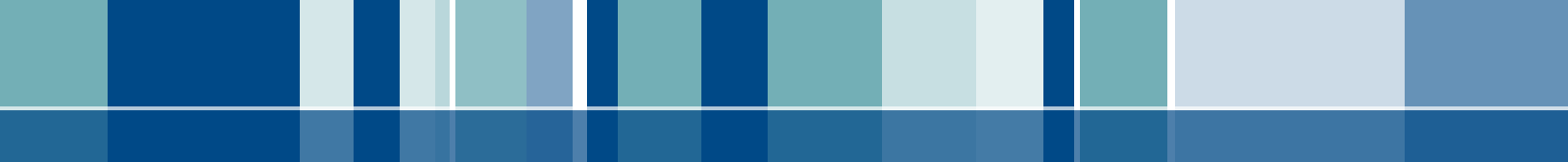
What if the culture was simply irresistible to those looking for a job and a magnet for those currently working there?

In our work with thousands of employees in all types of long-term care and senior living settings, we have found that there are four key factors to strengthening, and sustaining, a culture that focuses on employees.

1. **Awaken:** Reflect on how each person contributes to the organizational culture
2. **Assess:** Review strengths, identify opportunities
3. **Align:** Ensure processes support goals
4. **Anchor:** Achieve established goals and sustain the changes that have been put into place

AWAKEN THE POSSIBILITIES

The first step is to awaken the possibilities by reflecting on how each person contributes to the organizational culture. New hires might come to you with the right technical skills, but if we want people to look forward to coming to work, committed to their fellow employees and dedicated to the people that they serve, people are going to need additional abilities. This is especially true for leaders.



People need to be passionate, committed and dedicated to their work. These “skills” aren’t found in their training or education before they are hired, and they usually aren’t covered in orientation once they are hired. Because they haven’t been exposed to these topics before, they often don’t see the need for them.

A strong leadership team is fundamental to transformational change. As the American College of Health Care Administrators’ (ACHCA) 2007 leadership position paper states, “Most LTC leaders have both the heart and desire to achieve high levels of performance. Unfortunately, they often lack the training and support systems that will help them to escape from crisis management, develop a vision for excellence, and create the culture changes and disciplines needed for the vision to be realized.” ACHCA’s statement reflects our experiences with the many leaders we have worked with across North America. Leaders, supervisors and managers set the tone for the organization and create a culture that either supports engagement or hinders it.

To prepare for an engagement improvement program, focus on awakening employees’ to what is possible when people are fully giving their all, and how each and every person is contributing to the organizational culture. For leaders that means spending time honing and developing their skills. If you want people to commit to you, you must commit to them. Organizations must invest the resources in their leadership teams because engagement starts at the very top. On the upper end of the spectrum, forward thinking organizations may invest in a leadership development program from an outside company. On the lower end of the spectrum, organizations with fewer resources may try to create their own opportunities for learning through programs such as discussion revolving around a leadership book or article.

Many employees describe a boss that they would do anything for as “passionate”. Passion cannot be taught — it must be awakened. Leaders must demonstrate and inspire passion in both themselves and others. Passionate leaders get their power from enabling others to accomplish things, not in directing how others should work.

The investment yield in creating passionate leaders, who will in turn inspire passionate team members, is substantial. Cost savings, increased revenues, improved KPIs, and happier customers are some of the wide-ranging outcomes.

10 KEYS TO Building Engagement

Employee engagement and retention today means understanding an empowered workforce's desire for flexibility, creativity, and purpose. Here are ten keys to hardwiring engagement into your organization:

- 1. Begin day one:** Effective recruitment and orientation programs are the first building blocks to engagement, and begin with the first interaction a prospective employee has with the organization. Newly hired employee should be given both extensive orientation to not only their specific job and role, but also the company mission, vision, and values.
- 2. Hire the right managers:** Great managers have great talent for supporting, positioning, empowering, and engaging their staff. Whether hiring from the outside or promoting from within, organizations that select managers for the unique skills necessary to effectively manage people greatly increase the odds of employee engagement. The qualities that help employees excel in other roles are oftentimes different from what's needed in a management role, and the reality is that star performers don't always make the best leaders. Choosing the right managers in an organization has an immediate effect on employees' engagement.
- 3. Communicate early and often:** Frequent communication through a variety of means is key. Clear and consistent communication of what is expected of employees paves the way for an engaged workforce. Be sure to listen, too, and involve staff in decision-making whenever possible. Regular town halls, held at times convenient to staff on every shift, create a great opportunity for dialogue and sharing.
- 4. Adequate resources are key:** One of the more frequent demoralizers in senior living organizations is a lack of basic supplies, equipment and information needed for employees to do their best every day. Frequently asking staff, "Do you have what you need to do your job?" is key to identifying and correcting this foundation to engagement.
- 5. Training is impactful:** Invest time and resources early to ensure staff are trained properly. Senior living leaders typically spend a significant portion of their time fixing problems that could be avoided by improved staff training. Ensure standards are clear, reasonable, and followed. This may mean dusting off the policy and procedure manual, getting input from line staff and supervisors on the best way to actually accomplish work, and then communicating those standards through job routines, work aids, and clear direction. A key engagement question is, "Do I know what is expected of me at work?" Confusion or uncertainty about job tasks is a big demotivator.
- 6. Learning is better:** The most engaged employees are driven by an insatiable desire to learn, and most engagement research shows that learning opportunities, professional development, and career progression are among the top drivers of employee satisfaction. Provide constant opportunities for employees to learn—and not just in technical areas, like resident-specific disease conditions and best work practices, but also communication skills, stress management techniques, and personal growth topics.
- 7. Provide frequent feedback (and focus on the positive!):** Identify employees' strengths, and provide feedback on how employees are using their strengths to exhibit desirable behaviors and achieve beneficial results. Be sure to tie feedback on performance to the overall goals of the team, needs of the residents and applicable regulatory standards. This links job performance with part of the larger mission as opposed to simply fulfilling job responsibilities. Deliver feedback frequently, in a timely and specific way; employees should receive positive appreciation no less than weekly, and be sure to avoid the "feedback sandwich" where a piece of critical feedback is sandwiched between two pieces of positive feedback.
- 8. Build a distinctive corporate culture:** Organizations should promote a strong, distinct work culture brand where the goals and values of managers are aligned across all work areas and communities. Words are not enough; employees will be looking to managers to live the company values and goals around employee engagement in their everyday interactions.
- 9. Consider "stay" interviews:** Many companies conduct "exit" interviews to find out why employees are leaving. It is far better to also use "stay" interviews to learn what it would take for an employee to stay at a company.
- 10. Celebrate your successes:** One of the keys to high employee engagement is recognition. Look for reasons, big and small, to celebrate. This might involve reaching a milestone such as years of service or hitting that goal that the team was targeting. It might be something minor, such as having success with the first step towards a major change.

Some of the key elements that should be included in a development program to awaken leaders:

- **Conduct a Self-assessment:** Often the self-evaluation process creates a “wake-up call” for leaders to take action on changing their approach. Additionally, 360° Assessments that allow superiors, peers and subordinates to share their feedback offer another dimension of reflection. (We utilize the 360 Leadership Practice Inventory for our clients, which is based on decades of research.)
- **Focus on Personal Ownership:** Leaders must recognize that they are setting the tone in everything that they say and do. Want strong customer service? Provide strong customer service to residents and team members. Tired of negativity overrunning the organization? Focus on the positive when you walk around and in meetings.
- **Challenge the Status Quo:** Leaders should learn how to reframe a problem, weigh the possible solutions and focus on taking action on what they learn.
- **Inspire with a Shared Vision:** Having a common goal connects people and motivates them to work towards it. Just like the NASA janitor who told President Kennedy that his job was putting men on the moon, the vision of the organization should inspire every single person working there.
- **Discuss Actual Issues:** It is helpful to not only learn theory, but to discuss real life work-related challenges that leaders are dealing with. This helps them to discover how a new leadership approach can drive a resolution.
- **Empower Others:** Leaders are more effective when the people around them are able to make decisions and deal with issues that impact them or those they serve. One definition of empowerment states that if there isn't a risk of something going wrong, people really aren't empowered!

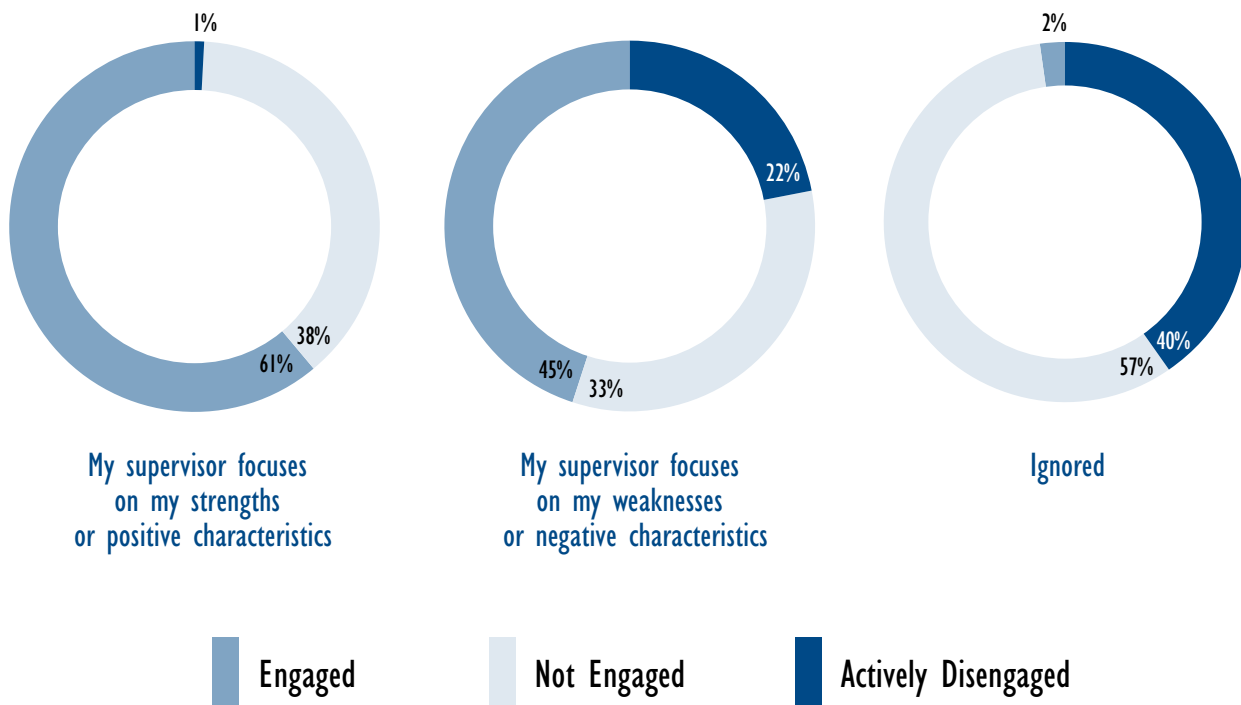
Some of the key elements that should be included to awaken passionate team members:

- **Hold a kick-off:** It's crucial for employees to hear first-hand what leaders think, expect, and are prepared to support. Be sure to draw a clear picture of how engagement impacts the organization's performance and its ability to serve residents and guests every day. Conclude the event by speaking to the timeline for rolling out assessment work and follow-through steps.
- **Host a Team Retreat:** This is great way for staff groups to target the core concepts of engagement: communication, team building, collaboration and respect. Gathering together away from work, staff can connect with each other, engage in skill-building, and reflect upon personal strengths and opportunities.

- **Provide frequent recognition and appreciation:** Crucial components to building a team of engaged employees, that without, make it difficult to provide the high-quality care and service that your residents expect and deserve. In fact, as much as 20% of employee productivity can be directly linked to the amount of recognition or praise an employee has received in the past seven days, according to research by Gallup.
- **Provide feedback:** Focusing on positive work and strengths is a strong predictor of employee engagement, while providing little to no feedback will almost guarantee a lack of engagement, as displayed in the table below.

It may be tempting to forego this first step of awakening leaders and team members and move directly to the second phase, assessment. However, this will set the organization up for a scenario of quickly implemented, quickly forgotten. By allowing people to see how your organization can be different and emphasizing their personal contribution to the organizational culture, they will be equipped to implement changes that will sustain and drive outcomes.

Figure 1 Focus on Strengths



ASSESS YOUR CURRENT CULTURE

The second step to building an organization with high levels of employee engagement is to assess what is currently going well at your organization and what could be better. Assessments create a baseline for development, and can provide a sense of where an organization stands. It is absolutely crucial to understand that assessing the culture is only an interim step — the hard work is what follows. Many organizations make the mistake of administering yearly satisfaction surveys only to shelve the results or let action plans linger in committees.


Asking an employee for feedback and then ignoring the result is worse than not asking at all.

Make sure the organization is prepared to listen honestly to feedback and commit to making improvements where needed. This does not mean that every request that is communicated by a staff member is fulfilled. There will undoubtedly be requests that are unrealistic to tackle either currently, or even in the future. An example might be an overwhelming desire to renovate the structure of the building. In cases such as this one be sure to disclose specific parameters and whenever possible the reason, such as limited capital budget. Acknowledging that their voices have been heard is extremely empowering for staff. Using the renovation example, recognize this as a hot topic up front and ask that feedback is limited to suggestions for refurbishment within a specified budget.

Some options for assessing the current level of engagement and the organizational culture include:

Engagement Surveys

Engagement surveys can offer valuable insights from employees. They provide a foundation for digging deeper into employee's concerns and can be utilized to develop questions for focus groups and/or one-on-one conversations. A particular question may have a very positive response in one department or might be uncovered as an area of concern for the entire organization. Having this information allows leaders and supervisors to ask team members more specific and detailed questions to discover what is happening that can be replicated or avoided.



Engagement surveys also provide a baseline for tracking staff engagement and satisfaction. A goal of “Increase employee engagement” is too vague. Having a specific measurement at the start of an employee engagement initiative provides the opportunity to create clear goals with measurable outcomes. These goals might be based on overall engagement or focus on one question, for example: “Ensure employees feel that their work is appreciated over the next 12 months. There will be a 15% increase in staff who positively answer the statement, ‘In the last seven days, I have been given thanks or praise for a job well done.’” Without a baseline, it is impossible to know if 15% is a realistic, yet challenging, goal to strive for in your organization.

Focus Groups

A focus group is a small-group discussion guided by a trained facilitator. It’s a great way to gain descriptive information from staff about their experiences, perceptions and ideas for improvement. The group’s composition and discussion are carefully planned to create a nonthreatening environment in which people are actively encouraged to express their candid opinions. Because a focus group relies on honest feedback, consider bringing in a facilitator from another site within the organization or an external facilitator who does not work for the company.

In addition to gathering open-ended feedback, small focus groups can help inform and guide the creation of surveys and other methods for collecting feedback from larger groups by bringing your attention to ideas or questions that you might not have considered. They also help to focus previously considered ideas and provide specific benefits and drawbacks that have not been raised.

Employee Councils

An employee council is a small group of employees that meets regularly to understand the current engagement landscape, investigate barriers that staff are experiencing, and provide recommendations to organizational leadership. Because engagement is closely linked to appreciation, employee councils also typically provide guidance around employee appreciation, recognition and staff fun.

Outside Advising

Sometimes, the best way to understand your current culture is to bring in outside eyes. When doing so, make sure the consultant is aligned with your organization's goals and energy. Look for a group with a track record of catalyzing change and building sustained results.


ALIGN PROCESSES WITH GOALS

After discovering what is possible in the organization (Awaken) and where the organization is currently (Assess), it's time to work on aligning the two. This step involves a results-oriented approach to reviewing what has happened in the previous two steps and emphasizes action. The establishment of SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time-bound) goals creates a way to make greater contributions to the organization's success. Review the findings and recommendations from the earlier phases and prioritize goals based on this information. Goals should be limited to four or five and focus on targets that support the organization as a whole, instead of the norm, where separate departmental goals are formed and unfortunately reinforce a silo effect — something that should be avoided at all costs!

Following the creation of SMART goals, action plans that articulate how the goals will be attained must be established. Each action plan should be step-by-step and include the responsible party and a due date. The plan should be broken down into small achievable steps. Vague steps in an action plan, such as "Update orientation program" are too large and overwhelming and often result in no significant progress being made. The objective is for action to be taken on each of the established goals. Specific action items and their due dates might change based on current happenings, but the action plan should be updated accordingly to reflect these changes.

Without action, there are no outcomes.

In multi-site organizations, each site should create their goals based on each being mutually interdependent and supporting the organization's overall goals. For example, if a company wide goal is to lower turnover, one site might focus on improving learning opportunities for staff while another might work on increasing recognition. Both have the ultimate goal of reducing turnover, but are approaching it in different ways based on the information they uncovered during the assessment phase.



Ensure that goals are shared with all levels of staff, not just the leadership team. An integral component of employee engagement is the ability for staff to feel that they are part of the mission of the organization. They want to know that their work makes a difference. The goals that have been established support the organization's mission and every employee should feel that they are able to make a contribution to them.

ANCHOR THE CHANGES

After new programs or processes are put into place, there must be a mindful approach to sustaining change. If precious time and resources have been spent on researching, discussing and implementing a change it needs to stick. Don't let the initial excitement die down and then slowly disintegrate. When new programs are constantly being introduced but fall apart shortly after, team members begin to see every change as the "flavor of the month" and just patiently wait until it inevitability goes away too. Opportunities to anchor changes in place include:

Accountability Check-in's

Over time, the excitement of establishing goals and action plans is replaced with the day-to-day "busyness" of attending to urgent matters. Accountability checks help to reduce the emphasis on putting out fires and motivate the organization to give more significance to important matters: those that are helping to achieve the established goals. Check-in's occur on a regularly scheduled periodic basis and depending on the goal may be weekly, bi-weekly, monthly or quarterly. These accountability checks should involve reviewing the action plan and actual outcomes. The person guiding the check-in's can be a leader in the organization or an external facilitator. In addition to receiving a status update, they should challenge the team to think about next steps, ensure that the action plan is sufficiently updated, and communicated additional information and resources to the team.

Discontinuation Process

Sustainability does not mean that a change is set in stone and never to be updated. Introducing any new practice or program requires flexibility and openness. Instead of scrapping an entire process, perhaps a key part of it needs to be updated. For example, if a new onboarding program is failing to make a dent in new employees leaving after just a few weeks of employment it might not be a result of the old onboarding program being better; perhaps a new strategy for recruiting mentors is all that is needed. However, there are times when a change truly is not achieving what the organization had planned. In this case, discontinuing the program should be reviewed with just as much research and discussion as the organization had when they started the program. Too often the decision to scrap a recently implemented change occurs in the hallway or in a quick phone conversation, resulting in a reinforcement of the “flavor of the month” belief for employees.

Measurable Goals

The measurable goals and benchmarks established in Step 3 provide a foundation to compare how well changes are being sustained. As data is collected to track the impact of a recently introduced program, and numbers begin to fall, the reason for the decrease should be researched and addressed. Additionally, if a particular month is very successful, the team should review what contributed to the success and replicate the identified contributing factors.

Share Updates

Transparency is an important component of employee engagement. Share updates on organizational goals with employees during town hall meetings, departmental get-togethers and one-on-one discussions. Remember, each team member wants to know how he or she contributes to the success of the organization. Providing relevant data and next steps on the action plan along with encouraging input, motivates employees to do their part to achieve established goals.



A CALL TO ACTION

Engagement, retention, and employee productivity are complex and multi-faceted problems, and building an irresistible culture is not a “once and done” project. Rather, it requires an “always on” approach, where your organization constantly creates opportunities to listen more closely, develop opportunities and involve employees in decision-making.

Once a year surveys are useful for creating a baseline and monitoring performance, but to build a culture of engagement, organizations need to deploy a range of tools. Employees today are overwhelmed with too much work, managers are under pressure to build the right work environment, human resources is trying to build programs for well-being and work-life balance, and the business itself is trying to focus more heavily on residents.

Engaging employees and building a compelling workplace culture is not easy. It takes dedication and a relentless focus on being excellent every day, but organizations can no longer afford to ignore employee engagement as a key strategic priority. To respond to changing market forces around resident expectations, cost, and quality performance, every staff member must be increasingly invested in key organizational goals, which simply is not possible without a strong framework supporting engagement. Senior living providers that invest heavily in engagement initiatives will find their organizations poised to lead in the highly competitive future and ahead of the staffing crisis.

TOP SEVEN COMMON THEMES IDENTIFIED DURING THE ASSESS PHASE

Theme	Common Feedback	Recommendations
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees often report favoritism, unequal standards and differing treatment by supervisors and managers. • There is little distinction between poor performers and star employees and no incentive to perform well. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create administrative standards that are transparent and communicated to all staff, especially around sensitive topics like scheduling, assignments, and promotions or lead work. • Develop standards of behavior for all employees and incorporate a performance-based ongoing feedback system. • Communicate expectations and standards to all staff, and address team members privately who are not meeting those expectations.
Adequate Supplies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees lack access to necessary supplies to complete their work. • Complaints of hoarding supplies by certain areas or shifts. • Concerns that management cares more about budgets than meeting resident needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate whether the issue is related to a lack of supplies, a lack of access, or a lack of information. Is the problem present on certain shifts, for instance, or weekends? • Ask staff daily, “Do you have the supplies you need to do your job?” • Reduce barriers to access (locked storage rooms, distance to supplies).
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “They don’t tell us anything” – One of the most frequently heard pieces of feedback. • Employees often report significant variation of communication based on work location, shift, and relationship with managers. • Corporate communication is typically viewed as top-down only. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host town hall meetings, incorporate key messages into shift to shift report, post news in key traffic areas, and promote to all team members to share information with others. • Incorporate team huddles at each shift. Huddles sometimes meet resistance from staff, but successful implementing huddles can greatly improve communication.
Leadership Presence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders spend too much time behind closed doors or in meetings. • DON/ ADONs have too much paperwork to help staff. • Swing, night and weekend shift staff typically report a lack of leadership involvement and access. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be active and present in the home/community. While it may be unrealistic to spend quality time with every team member weekly or even quarterly, it is important to know your team. Identify one activity that you can lead on a regular basis. Attend council meetings and host townhalls. • Visit all shifts regularly, including nights and weekends.
Morale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often a symptom of other causes, like poor leadership, lack of supplies and irregular or infrequent communication. • Statements like, “nothing ever changes around here,” and “I don’t think the company cares about me” are frequently shared. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While the root cause of low morale is caused by a number of factors, we like to recommend creating opportunity for small wins. Build morale by discovering what small changes could have a large impact. • Show your appreciation to your team members by giving praise every seven days, and finding out what is important to them as individuals.
Resident Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints that there aren’t enough staff to do the work. • Concern over the care provided to residents by poor performers or other shifts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure the staffing model is understood by staff; frequently, there is confusion around acuity-based models or other adjustments. • Leaders need to be visible and available to help when needed; model the way for others by answering call lights, and assisting during mealtime.
Teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presence of cliques within teams. • Lack of support or communication between departments. • Lack of assistance from managers. • Unresolved interpersonal conflicts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A primary role of leadership is to break down silos and build strong, cross-functional teams. • Incorporate team building activities into training and highlight instances of positive teamwork. • Form a multi-disciplinary committee where everyone can work together towards a common cause.

A FOCUS ON MANAGERS

Top market forces affecting manager engagement



Constant Connectivity

Proliferation of smartphones and personal laptops means leaders are available 24/7



Acute Margin Pressure

Leaders have to do more with fewer resources due to changing reimbursement structures



Increasing Pace of Change

Rapidly changing protocols and procedures leave leaders feeling tired, stressed, and burned out



Uncertain About the Future

Leaders uncertain about the future of their organization and their job security



Systemization

Industry-wide mergers and acquisitions are changing organizational culture and structure

While many factors of an organization impact engagement levels, the relationship between managers and employees is arguably one of the most critical. Well managed employees are able to overlook many other shortcomings of their organization, including lower pay, older equipment, and slimmer benefits. Decades of research from various sources, including Gallup, has shown that people leave managers, not organizations.

Managers are particularly important to an organization's employee engagement strategy. Manager engagement is highly correlated with staff engagement, and managers are usually the key to whether an engagement strategy succeeds or fails. Managers have specific needs related to their place "in the middle" between line staff and executive leaders. Therefore, engagement strategies should specifically target mid-level managers and front-line supervisors to ensure success.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Engagement Drivers	What Managers Want	Cause	Challenge	Strategy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Executive actions reflect mission and values. 	Executives as visible role models.	As organizations get larger, managers and directors are farther away from executives in the C-suite. Managers and directors have fewer opportunities to interact with executives, which means every interaction carries more weight.	Executives don't take full advantage of opportunities to role model mission and values.	Promote Executive Ownership of Engagement.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kept informed of organization's plans. My ideas and suggestions valued by organization. 	Respect for me as a leader.	Organizations are changing at a rapid pace. Executives are continuously receiving new information and making decisions. Managers and directors may not know about decisions until they're announced to all staff.	Leaders lose credibility when they can't answer staff questions.	Tell Leaders First — and Help Them Tell Staff.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organization recognizes employees. Executives respect contributions of my department. 	Respect for my team's contributions.	Leaders aren't sure how to get executives' attention for the great work their team is doing. Much of the recognition they see across the organization seems one-off and subjective.	Team recognition is ad hoc.	Recognize Leaders Individually and Through Their Teams.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance review helps me improve. Manager has helpful discussions with me about my career. Interested in promotion opportunities. Training and development help me improve. 	Customized professional growth.	Organizations have limited resources to invest in leader development, so they offer one-size-fits-all training opportunities.	Few customized development options exist for non-succession candidates.	Decouple Development from Promotion.



NOTES



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Denise Boudreau-Scott is President of DRIVE, which helps senior living organizations improve the resident and staff experience, and the bottom-line, through more engaged leaders and employees.

A former nursing home and assisted living administrator, she is a serial volunteer.

Denise is founder and chair of the NJ Alliance for Culture Change, serves as vice-chair of the National Association of Administrator Boards' (NAB) Member Relations Committee and is a member of NAB's Exam Writing Committee.

Denise also serves as a board member for the Pioneer Network.

Denise received her Bachelor of Science in Gerontology from the University of Scranton and her Master in Health Administration from Cornell University, where she was recently appointed as a lecturer and Executive in Residence.

She is proud to share that she started her work in senior living as a dietary aide and nursing assistant.

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