

## Hiring and keeping the best people

Create a talent plan to reenergize and refocus your crew

It seems as though we never stop talking about or focusing on shortages, and that's particularly true about staffing our facilities. Nursing shortages. CNA shortages. We've become resigned to the notion that these shortages are apparently perennial and will probably never go away. Could it be, though, that these shortages can be solved by questioning our everyday assumptions and trying a different approach?

No question about it: One of our most urgent business challenges is finding, cultivating, and keeping extraordinary talent. Sometimes we kid ourselves that "good people" don't exist. There are lots of good people out there, and they probably already have pretty good work experiences. It is our responsibility to clearly identify exactly who we are looking for and come up with more creative ways to find them. It's also up to us to establish a culture and an environment that distinguishes our organization from others so that we can attract those talented people and make them want to stay.

The question, then, is: How can we change our work culture to attract, grow, evaluate, reward, and retain the best in the business? If you think you've already heard more about culture change than you've wanted to hear, consider the following statistics about organizations in general:

- The estimated cost of replacing one highly skilled employee is 200% of his/her salary.
- People who leave their jobs usually do so to pursue professional development or vocational alternatives.
- At any one time, more than 25% of an organization's valued employees intend to leave the organization. Nearly 25% more are undecided about leaving but are considering it.
- While things such as satisfaction, a sense of connectedness to the

group, the ability to balance life and work, and the opportunity to grow may seem "hokey" to a traditional business mind, the art and science of retention has shown us that they are critical factors to business success today.

- When you look at *Fortune's* 100 Best Companies to Work For, you will notice that those companies are obsessed with their culture and environments. They work at culture change purposefully and are constantly evolving.

You can increase your ability to attract top talent by creating a talent plan, a comprehensive road map for attracting great people, growing them, and allowing them to create their own legacies within your organization. For most of us, creating a talent plan requires us to regain and redirect our energy and focus, and replace "same old, same old" habits in hiring and retention with a new set of thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and actions.

Talent planning touches everyone at every level, from the board of directors/top administration on down, thus promoting a strong sense of "we." Everyone should share information with one another, and leaders should make themselves accessible. Keep in mind that talent planning is not a program, it is a mind-set. It is not a magic bullet, but rather an ongoing, lasting way of working that will take a year or longer to create.

At the heart of the successful talent plan is the vivid vision of creating leaders at all levels within the organization. That vision comes alive along two distinct but related tracks:

1. Assisting everyone (all staff) to grow their personal abilities to lead within their own area of expertise. It involves learn-



ing and unlearning, challenging autopilot thinking and acting, and getting rid of an overblown fear of regulations and surveys. Staff are introduced to the power of intentional thinking, get permission to develop and "own" solutions and, in the process, build self-esteem.

2. Assisting a smaller group of "influencers" (today's management team and those with potential for bigger roles) to lead in an even bigger, broader context. Your management team will not only want to grow their own personal abilities, but refine other skills as well, including:

- creating a vivid, "Technicolor" vision of the future;
- communicating that future in such a way that it ignites sparks of possibility in others;
- showing the tenacity to fan those sparks day in and day out, while keeping the vision fresh;
- inspiring everyone to "get on their own roll" and stay there;
- developing the humility to practice "followership," i.e., once staff have

- been given some form of leadership responsibility, following its lead; and
- developing the art of storytelling, focusing on evidence that your organization is terrific and that it got that way because you collectively decided to make it so.

The following are three illustrations of talent-planning approaches using these principles.

**Conduct business huddles.** Adopt this next generation version of the stand-up meeting. Anyone can call a huddle in any place (hallways, too), and they're quick, laser-focused, inclusive, and solution-oriented. Hospital physicians have long practiced this and have a great name for it: "corridor consults."

**Reassess the Welcome Program for new staff.** Retention attention must begin immediately. The first 90 days are critical to the development of patterns for good working relationships. We need to put an end to the "we eat our young" mentality and create a rich mentoring program that intentionally teams new employees with what I call organizational ambassadors. If these new team members are indeed special, then treat them that way. Remember that the single biggest influence in encouraging top talent is credible, accessible leadership.

**Recognize that little things matter.** The LTC industry is heavily regulated. But that doesn't mean that there aren't hundreds of ways to regularly dial up the quality of work life at your facility. Here are a few of the ideas that colleagues have shared over time:

- Start a lending program. Lend staff anything you can, including vehicles, money, equipment, books, china, and furniture.
- Create a scholarship program for families.
- Have a journal club of newsletters, magazines, and books pertaining to LTC, and multiple learning opportunities for everyone.
- Have great food, not just for residents but for staff.
- Have organized fun every day; get staff involved in activities and events.
- Allow staff to share in financial rewards for excellent performance.
- Be flexible when an employee's situation seems to call for it. Look for

opportunities to be flexible.

- Use coaching skills. Truth-telling, active listening, and resolving problems/attitudes that drain us of our energy and creativity are key coaching skills. It isn't surprising to learn that nine out of ten employee "problems" are perceived by individuals who feel that they are not being heard. According to the old business model, we engage employees by telling them to "stop talking and get to work." Talent planning takes you in the opposite direction—telling employees to "start talking and get to work."

These are a few examples of talent planning maneuvers that will produce significant results over time. Right now, few of us have a waiting list of eager applicants. But that could change. We only have to work at it. And with time and an increasingly talented staff, maybe we won't need so many applicants. ■

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