

Employee Satisfaction: One Hospital's Success in Making and Sustaining Improvements

Columbus Regional Hospital, Columbus, Indiana

Columbus Regional Hospital is a 225-bed hospital located in Columbus, Indiana. Columbus Regional has always performed well on HealthStream Research's Employee Insights Survey, and for the past several years they have continued to improve and sustain that improvement. Three years ago Columbus Regional was performing at or above the HealthStream Research National Norm for nearly every item on the survey. Today, they are scoring significantly higher than the HealthStream Research Norm on every item on the survey and are performing at or above the 75th percentile for nearly every item on the survey. We interviewed Vice President of Professional and Support Services Jim Bickel, Director of Human Resources Joe Turco, and HR Manager Judy Mead to find out how Columbus Regional has been able to make and sustain such improvements. They believe that leadership, accountability, communication, and retaining good employees are the major contributors to their employees' high levels of satisfaction.

HealthStream Research

HealthStream Research is a national leader in the measurement of physician, employee, patient, and community satisfaction for healthcare organizations. We currently work with more than 1,100 facilities nationwide, including many of the nation's largest for-profit and not-for-profit health systems and specialty healthcare companies.

Setting Out to Create a Superb Working Environment

Employee satisfaction has been fairly stable at Columbus Regional over the past 10 years, due in large part to the administrative leadership. The current CEO, Doug Leonard, moved into the position of CEO in 1997 after serving as Columbus Regional's COO. Doug and his administrative team wanted Columbus Regional to be known as a great place to work. With this goal in mind, they set out to create a superb working environment.

The first obstacle that the administration had to tackle was a bad reputation in the Human Resources department, which became a strategic priority to improve. Administration knew that in order to develop the work environment they desired, they would have to have a likeminded HR department. After investing much time and effort, CEO Doug Leonard and his team were able to put together a Human Resources team they could be proud of. Having the right people in the right positions has made all the difference for Columbus Regional's employee satisfaction.

Administration and HR took action on the principle that an employee often leaves an organization because of his or her leader, not because of the organization itself. They also strongly believe that leadership impacts both employee and patient satisfaction. With this in mind, Columbus Regional

decided to focus on leadership development among its employees. They wanted to go beyond theories about leadership and get to the tools and skills that leaders need. Columbus Regional Hospital leveraged their partnership with The Studer Group to enhance their existing leadership development and accountability system. These enhancements consisted of restructuring their quarterly leadership development institutes and linking leadership performance to outcome measurements.

Columbus Regional also implemented a system of accountability to maintain these leadership skills throughout the hospital. The administrative team wanted to ensure that leaders were not only acquiring, but also deploying the leadership skills they had learned. Identified leaders throughout the hospital are assessed on an annual basis. Every leader is asked to identify goals based on overarching corporate objectives. These goals must be measurable rather than subjective. To motivate leaders throughout the hospital, the administration has tied bonuses to these goals. Leadership is also required to improve on either retention rate or overall employee satisfaction from the HealthStream Research employee survey. In addition to these goals, managers and leaders identify goals specific to their work groups. Columbus Regional uses the Work Group Summaries from the employee survey to identify target areas, set goals, and measure improvement by department.

Emphasis on Communication

Columbus Regional also places strong emphasis on communication between employees and managers. Administration has to be deliberate about communication in a hospital the size of Columbus Regional. Leadership makes a point to be visible across all shifts. Over the last two years, administration has made it a priority to get employee input from various shifts and departments. This has proven to be very challenging, especially for 3rd shift and weekend employees. However, when administration received complaints about the food on 3rd shift, they knew they had to take action. They tried using various meeting times to involve 3rd shift employees, but had difficulty getting other employees to cover these shifts. Instead of giving up, administration got creative.

They decided that they would go to the source of the problem. Several representatives from administration went to the cafeteria during the 3rd shift. As people went through the line, administration asked them for feedback. Administration was able to communicate with employees because they created an opportunity for this communication.

Achieving a 90% Response Rate

In addition to regular communication, Columbus Regional also makes a strong effort to get employee feedback through the employee satisfaction survey. Columbus Regional already had a high response rate of 77% in 2005. However, they wanted to go the extra mile and get nearly every employee's input. Judy Mead, HR Manager, spoke with Gary Tomcik, National Director of Healthcare at HealthStream Research, about response rates and decided to set her goal for a 90% response rate. This was both a personal goal for Judy and an organizational goal for Columbus Regional. When the time came for their annual HealthStream Research employee survey, the Human Resources department went into action. Before administering the survey, Columbus Regional decided to offer the survey both on paper and on-line. Using the web option gave employees greater flexibility for completing the survey. In addition, the HR department used payroll staffers to inform employees of the upcoming survey. The survey was also highlighted in the employee newsletter. Using multiple forms of communication allowed Columbus Regional to reach

more employees. To make the web option accessible to all employees, Judy set up two computers in the Human Resources office. An additional computer lab was also available to employees. Judy also used laptops to make the web survey accessible to various departments that might not be located near the HR office or the computer lab.

Once the survey process started, Judy used e-mail to update leadership daily. Throughout the survey process, Judy used HealthStream Research's online interactive reporting website to monitor their response rates by department. This information was shared with all members of leadership.

There were no secrets about response rates among departments because they all wanted the same outcome—a high response rate for *all* of Columbus Regional. This regular communication and departmental focus helped Columbus Regional reach their goal of a 90% response rate on their last two employee surveys.

Leadership at Columbus Regional realized that employee feedback is the first step to improving and maintaining employee satisfaction. They also realized that in order for improvement to be made, the employee feedback must be taken seriously. After the survey results are returned to Columbus Regional, a presentation is made to the executive team, as well as managers and directors. Individuals in all departments of the hospital have access to the survey information through HealthStream Research's online reporting.

Managers have six weeks to share the results with their employees and then develop a **Ranking Action Grid**. This grid is used to determine the 5 items in each department that are targets for improvement. This information is given back to the Human Resources department and reviewed. Similarities across departments are often found, and these departments are put together to help one another with improvements. Having multiple departments working together ensures that good ideas are being shared across the hospital.

Last year's survey results indicated an opportunity for improvement in the area of leadership, specifically related to employees' immediate supervisors. To improve these scores, Columbus Regional put several new practices in place. For example, managers began to round on both patients and employees. This gives managers the opportunity to ask specific questions and get feedback from employees on a regular basis.

Rewarding Outstanding Performance

Columbus Regional also places an emphasis on employee recognition, specifically on-the-spot recognition. This immediate praise ensures that the employee knows precisely what he or she is being praised for. It also creates an environment where both managers and employees intentionally look for excellent work performance.

Columbus Regional also enlisted the help of administration. Members of administration regularly send thank-you notes to applaud employees for specific actions. This both rewards employees and keeps administration connected to front-line staff. Managers can also submit the names of high-performing employees to win prizes, such as tickets to an Indiana Pacers' basketball game. Columbus Regional also offers financial rewards for meeting patient satisfaction goals throughout the year. In addition to rewarding outstanding performance, Columbus Regional makes an effort to reward all employees and show appreciation for their service. Last year they sponsored a "Day at the Ballpark" and had over 1,400 employees and family members attend a minor league baseball

Success Story: Columbus Regional Hospital

game together. The administration strongly believes that this recognition and appreciation contributes to employee satisfaction.

The administration at Columbus Regional also attributes their high satisfaction scores to their efforts to retain good employees. Columbus Regional offers competitive pay and a rich benefit plan, including coverage for domestic partners. Employees have a lot of input, which creates a participative work environment; they really do feel they are part of a team, which contributes to low turnover and vacancy rates.

Administration at Columbus Regional wanted their hospital to be known as a great place to work. They were able to achieve that goal by focusing on leadership, accountability, communication, and retaining good employees. These key initiatives were supported by employee feedback through surveys, use of a consulting partner, and a strong commitment to employee satisfaction. Congratulations to Columbus Regional Hospital—a top performer in Employee Satisfaction.