

Open Doors Raise Scores

Saint Louise Regional Hospital, Gilroy, California

Heroes usually aren't born that way. Most often, heroes are just ordinary people thrust into extraordinary circumstances. In 1999, Saint Louise Regional Hospital found themselves thrust into their own set of extraordinary circumstances, and their success can now be seen in the hallways of their hospital packed with heroes.

Saint Louise Regional Hospital has experienced a variety of organizational changes that contributed to a host of barriers to a cohesive executive environment. In 1999, Saint Louise Hospital was formed by merging two hospitals that varied greatly in their culture. The greatest concern may have been inherent in the union of two local competitors, complicated by the separate ideologies of each hospital. One hospital was a for-profit entity, while the other was a faith-based not-for-profit organization.

In 2000, the first year after the merger, turnover was calculated to be 34%, with one hundred and twenty-six associates leaving that year. Fast forward to fiscal year 2004, when turnover rates had been drastically cut to 9%, with a projection of 7.1% for the next fiscal year. What this suggests is that their concentrated efforts on improving leadership have created an environment that is clearly enjoyable to work in.

Now, Saint Louise is consistently at 99% to 100% productivity, making them the most productive hospital in the Daughters of Charity Healthcare System. "At every board meeting, the DCHS CEO and Northern California CFO recognizes us as the best in the system, and they encourage us to 'take this show on the road' and spread our best practices," said Lois Owens, Vice President of Patient Care and Clinical Services/CNE.

So, you ask, *how* did they achieve so much?

The Road to Success

"When we merged into a single hospital, even though we had two cultures there was only one common goal—safe patient care. By focusing on what we had in common, we were able to merge not just the two hospitals, but the two cultures," said Lois Owens, Vice President of Patient Care and Clinical Services/CNE. Rita Garcia, Vice President of Facility Services added, "It

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.

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was a real challenge. Even if you just look at the physical plant perspective, we had to absorb 150 new staff into an already occupied hospital. We found ourselves working alongside people we didn't know, and it was a real test of commitment to bring us all together.”

During the early stages of the merger, the hospital operated under a ‘skeleton leadership’ and did not function under the auspices of a CEO for the first year. “We went through so many changes that we joked about making the sign outside Velcro®,” said Rita Garcia. It was essential that the environment had the fundamental groundwork prepared before attention to other associate issues could be examined.

Through collaboration with the union, management was able to create a more mutual system in addressing associate concerns with compensation and benefits. Further, Saint Louise Regional Hospital’s strategic committee worked to involve the community as a whole, with the combination of hospital associates and those who resided within the community. Re-defining these boundaries helped the hospital maintain a pulse on the issues occurring outside of the organization as well.

By the time they came to HealthStream Research, Saint Louise Regional Hospital was already accustomed to major changes. “One of the most important qualities that grew out of our years of chaos was a culture of change, so we were ready for HealthStream Research’s recommendations,” said Rita Garcia. In 2003, HealthStream Research performed an Employee Insights Survey for Saint Louise associates. The following is brief summary of the Action Blueprint provided by HealthStream Research:

1. Hold a “Town Meeting” Day, sharing survey results and letting associates know what actions will be taken based on this survey
2. Celebrate the results of the Employee Insights Survey
3. Address opportunities for improvement:
 - My co-workers have a great deal of interest in satisfying patients
 - I would want to be a patient at this hospital if I needed medical care
 - The hospital is viewed very positively by the people who live in the service area
 - I am given the opportunity to participate in training and education programs to advance my career or to improve my skills for my current job
 - I believe our senior management models the behavior they expect of the other managers within the organization
 - My department operates at 100% efficiency
 - Our doctors consistently treat the associates with courtesy and respect
4. Emphasize customer service throughout the organization
5. Improve productivity in departments scoring low for the items “My department operates at 100% efficiency” and “I believe our senior management models the behavior they expect of the other managers within the organization”

Department Efficiency

Keys to department organization and efficiency include managers doing the following:

- Ensure appropriate staffing levels
- Clearly define expectations of staff
- Give all staff responsibility or autonomy over at least some aspects of their job

- Use the knowledge of associates who are “in the trenches”
- Recognize and reward productivity
- Deal firmly with non-productive and/or unethical associates

Senior Management Models Expected Behavior

- Top leaders should strive to be more visible, communicative, and to interact more often with associates throughout the hospital in order to reduce negative perceptions.
 - Responding to associate suggestions or comments is another step towards improving associate perceptions.
6. Consider management-training courses for managers in departments scoring low on the Management Theme
 7. Hold managers accountable for improvement

“HealthStream Research’s action plans were just what we needed. Our directors worked very hard on the Moments of Truth and Action Blueprints,” said Steve Sharrer, Vice President of Human Resources and Organizational Development. The leadership team worked collaboratively with the associates in re-defining job descriptions and their performance appraisal system. Ultimately, these two components were combined into one document to create a clearly specified list of competencies matched to job titles, which likely increased perceptions that their system was fair, as it directly involved associate input. While this may seem basic, it was essential in engaging associates and allowing them to feel that the measures they were being evaluated on were less arbitrary.

“Before, it was a hodgepodge of performance appraisal systems and job descriptions. Now, they are one in the same,” said Steve Sharrer. “We have focused on educating our associates in creating accountable job descriptions and performance appraisals. Having them as an integral part of the process resulted in our associates having a high level of trust and engagement in the system.”

Now, every year the directors sit down with their staff and review the accuracy and relevance of their job description/performance appraisal, and the associate is involved in defining their own job. “With the constant changes and new rules and regulations in healthcare, this annual job description/performance appraisal system allows us to make sweeping, hospital-wide changes and bring everybody up to new training requirements and competency levels,” said Steve Sharrer.

Another interesting aspect of this type of collaboration was the effort the Administration took to keep their associates informed of hospital processes. The leadership team makes it a practice to explain and educate associates on what is involved in specific tasks, such as scheduling, which helps explain formulas and other variables used in the decision-making process. This helps maintain the perception that decisions are made in a fair and calculated way.

After years of chaos, the leadership team was clearly adaptable to change and used this time as an opportunity to meet with external experts to help solidify a strong organizational structure. In 2003, the results presented by HealthStream Research indicated where the hospital was doing well in satisfying associates as well as areas in which the hospital could improve. The leadership of Saint Louise Regional Hospital was aggressive in their approach to fix these deficiencies and made use of the recommendations offered by HealthStream Research. Additionally, the management made use

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of the Action Plan provided within their Employee Insights Survey process, which helped provide a tool for monitoring key items on which they were being measured.

In response to the recommendations made by HealthStream Research, the management implemented several strategies to solicit associate feedback in order to improve overall operations within the hospital. Among these were two notable efforts that allowed employees to address their concerns and issues with actionable responses by management. The first was the execution of a ‘hotline,’ where associates are able to communicate issues of concern to senior leadership either anonymously or directly by including their name. Under this system, the issue is then delegated to a director who is responsible for owning that issue. “The hotline is connected to a director who is committed to *owning* the issue, and the director must respond within seven days. If the person chooses not to be anonymous, we commit to a one-on-one to address the problem. The issues are also brought up in department meetings,” said Louis Owens.

The CEO also created an open forum known as ‘Cookies and Conversation,’ which allows associates to express their views in a clearly defined setting devoted to such interactions. The CEO has made great efforts to create an environment where *everyone* feels included. Traditionally, he serves Christmas and Thanksgiving dinners throughout all shifts, which helps foster a culture of total engagement.

Additionally, the leadership team made great strides in associate satisfaction by employing tactics which made them more accessible to those within the organization. In an effort to stress their ‘open door’ policy, senior leadership made themselves more visible by doing ‘rounds’ on units and interacting with associates. With this in mind, the hospital executives also utilized a ‘bottom up’ approach to leadership, which placed emphasis on the input of those working on the front lines of patient care. “I go around to different units and purposefully hang around to see if anybody has something to say—and I usually come back with a list of issues to address,” said Lois Owens.

“Our leadership is made up of people who have risen up from the ranks. They’ve been on the front line and they know what’s going on. You can see this in how aggressively we all pursue our open door policy. If we see a closed door around here, we start to worry!” said Rita Garcia.

In addition to standard benefits that one might expect as an associate of any organization, the management team was innovative in recognizing employee contributions, which ultimately have impacted the associates’ perception of the hospital. The leadership teams created a program known as ‘Heart to Heart’ in which associates are recognized for actions that epitomize one of the hospital’s Values. In terms of acknowledgment, the associates are given a pin to wear, which helps promote the feeling of a job well done through visible recognition of their accomplishments.

“We have instilled a value of not only being visible, but being actively visible. When we are out on the floor, we are *looking* to catch someone doing their job well—and we recognize them on the spot. Our Heart to Heart pins have been very successful. Associates are also recognized for their years of service with Saint Louise. This year, we are going to hand out our first 35 year pin. By having a system where the associates can recognize each other and their years of service, *they* own the system. They are very proud of these accolades—they wear them all over their uniforms,” said Rita Garcia.

“Our strategic plans and goals become the CEO’s plans and goals, and the associates’ plans and goals are owned by the directors. We want each and every one of our associates working towards the *same* goals, and we all participate in creating them,” said Lois Owens.

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The most recent HealthStream Research survey scores show a clear picture of this culture of excellence:

Management Theme

- My manager gives me measurable goals to achieve (Overall: 97th , +.31 increase from previous survey, Nurses: 99th)
- My manager does a good job of recognizing associate contributions (Overall: 90th , +.29 increase from previous survey, Nurses: 99th)
- My manager is fair to all associates (Overall: 84th , +.25 increase from previous survey, Nurses: 91st)
- My manager holds everyone in our department accountable for their work (Overall: 93rd , +.31 increase from previous survey, Nurses: 94th)
- The performance appraisal system is fair (Overall: 99th , +.24 increase from previous survey, Nurses: 99th)

Communication Theme

- My manager shares all the information my coworkers and I need in order to feel part of the hospital team (Overall: 91st , +.37 increase from previous survey, Nurses: 94th)
- I feel completely free to express my views to my manager (Overall: 92nd , +.29 increase from previous survey, Nurses: 99th)

The most notable aspect of St. Louise Regional Hospital's improvement is that they far exceeded the average range of improvement in HealthStream Research's national databases. On average, HealthStream Research's clients improve .11 to .13 for each component measured, but Saint Louise Regional Hospital averaged close to .30!

“Certainly, hospitals can be stymied by a myriad of financial constraints; however, Saint Louise Regional Hospital is a testament to the fact that creating a culture of concern for associate well-being and following our Mission, Vision, and Values to provide excellent, compassionate care to the sick and poor and striving to become the center of health and healing for the communities we serve is arguably the greatest benefit of all that can be offered. It has been an amazing journey to our current level of success, and HealthStream Research was an essential partner. They came in, gave us an action plan, we stuck to it and it worked!” said Steve Sharrer.