Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is one of those terms that gets used frequently as a corporate buzzword. While its invocation may or may not be disingenuous, the concept of employee engagement is important to leadership no matter what catchy term it goes by. By engaging employees, leadership give the best opportunity for both the employees and the organization to grow. Organizations with proper employee engagement receive higher revenue and earnings per admission and per patient day, increase referrals from engaged clinical staff, reduce clinical staff recruiting costs, and sustain significant growth. Like anything else, employee engagement goes through up times and down times. There are a few reasons for lower engagement. Intentional efforts to increase engagement are also regularly made. Of course, if improvements are not made to employee engagement, there are ramifications that can come into effect.

**Lower Engagement**

Just like any other effort, employee engagement can go through times of growth and times of recession. There is a lessening of employee engagement currently in the healthcare industry. If one were to look into the issue, there would likely be many contributing factors. One of the biggest contributing factors to lower employee engagement is the influx of millennial workers into the workplace. At this point, baby boomers are retiring, leaving more positions open to be filled with younger staff. This generational change is changing the culture of the workplace for better or worse.

The millennial generation, those born between 1980 and 1999, differ from the previous generation in some significant ways. As with any generalizations, there are certainly individual millennial aged persons who do not fit the “standard”, but culturally the generation has developed a few key general traits. As a whole, they are less loyal, being less inclined toward a career mentality and more toward a gig mentality. Because of this, they tend to job hop easily and regularly (Piper, 2012). On a personal level, this can lead them to a varied and eclectic career path. As a leader however, their turnover costs the organization every time they leave.

Another reason for lower employee engagement for millennials is entitlement expectation. Again, there are members of this age group who do not fit this description, but it occurs enough to be addressed. For various reasons, millennials tend to have an expectation of entitlement. They are often not inclined to “pay their dues.” It is difficult to engage an employee when they believe they are entitled to more than what they are receiving.

**Intentional Efforts**

Any organization that would like to be successful and have fulfilled employees on staff should take intentional efforts to improve employee engagement. Even if engagement is already high, there are always measures to increase engagement. First, it is important to practice transparency in the organization (Clark, 2018). Being visible and available is a key step in employee engagement. If one is not available to communicate with the employee, one is not available to engage them. Communication is important. It is also imperative to set clear goals and practice follow through with them. Ultimately the goal is empowering nurses to drive their own practice. These efforts are in the interest of building rapport with the staff and validating their importance.

It is important to lead with optimism. The leader must champion the engagement before they can expect others to follow suit (Clark, 2018). They set the environment and give employees a role model to base their own behavior on. By personally approaching the day with a shot of positive energy, it is likely that it will have a positive effect on one or more staff members that day.

**Ramifications For Not Improving**

There are a number of ramifications for not pursuing improvement in employee engagement. The most severe of which is turnover. If an employee does not feel sufficiently engaged in their job, they will simply leave. Turnover is one of the hardest expenses in the healthcare industry. Turnover alone costs healthcare organizations $11 billion annually (Macauley, 2015). Decreased employee engagement results in turnover, which can have a significant negative impact financially on the department.

A disengaged employee also lacks ownership in their practice. They often do as they are told and nothing above and beyond what is asked of them. Because they are not invested in their job, they miss more work, which puts stress on the rest of the staff to pick up the slack (Macauley, 2015). This is not quality work in any industry, but in healthcare it can have disastrous consequences. A disengaged employee is not double-checking counts, sufficiently addressing patients’ needs, or fully committed to patient safety. This can have a negative effect on patient safety, patient satisfaction, and even the safety of fellow staff.

The effects of an organization with proper employee engagement were previously given. In the same way, those effects are reversed for improper employee engagement. Poor employee engagement results in an organization receiving lower revenue and earnings per admission and per patient day, decreased referrals from clinical staff, increased clinical staff recruiting costs, and experience no significant growth.

**Conclusion**

Engaging employees as a leader in a health care organization has far reaching effects. Not only does engaging employees have an effect on the employees themselves, it affects the organization and the patients it serves. A disengaged employee can put a patient in an unsafe situation due to negligence or apathy. This can naturally have significant negative consequences. It can affect the staff themself, the finances of the organization, and even the health of the patient. The health of the patient is of utmost important. If the patient’s health can be negatively affected, it is important to address the issue and make efforts to implement greater engagement.

References

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