



## **The Secret to Healthcare Survival: Your Employees**

*By Lisa T. Miller, CEO VIE Healthcare*

There's a paradigm shift taking place within the healthcare industry and many senior healthcare leaders are being challenged to change with the times. As competition amongst healthcare facilities increases, organizations are looking for new ways to reduce costs and improve services.

Increasingly, consumers are driving change in the healthcare industry. A recent survey by the Baptist Healthcare Leadership Institute reveals that patient satisfaction is the number one concern of healthcare administrators. This is in sharp contrast to a 2000 survey by *Modern Healthcare* in which 65% of administrators ranked declining Medicare/Medicaid reimbursements as their chief worry.

The shift from a purely bottom-line focus to a more humanistic focus is leaving many administrators at a loss for how to proceed. However, savvy hospital administrators are realizing that patient satisfaction is intimately related to employee satisfaction. So much so that hospitals that put employees first by implementing programs designed to increase employee engagement, empowerment and fulfillment find that their patient satisfaction scores rise. What many still don't realize, is that their employees also hold the key to decreasing costs and improving profitability.

So, what is the best way of meeting both your goals of reducing expenses and improving service? Ask your employees.

### **Getting Employees Involved**

While we hear repeatedly that "people are an organization's most important resource," few organizations make the best use of the latent potential of their employees. Innovative ideas can come from anyone in the healthcare workforce – from nurses to physicians to cleaning staff – the challenge facing many organizations lies in creating programs that encourage the sharing and implementation of these ideas.

Many of your front-line staff have ideas on how your organization can save money and do things better. The problem is that they either don't perceive management as being receptive to their ideas or there is no clear channel to communicate the ideas. At best the ideas get stuffed into a suggestion box never to be heard from again.

Traditional suggestion systems do little to motivate employees to improve or suggest change. There is no ownership. There is no satisfaction in seeing an idea accepted and implemented. There is no room for allowing employees to feel that they are making a difference and contributing in meaningful ways to their organization.

VIE Healthcare – EXCITE: *"Ideas from Within"*

Excellence in Creative Ideas within a Team Environment

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## **Employee Driven Ideas Systems**

To truly harness the creativity of every person in your organization, you must create a culture that fosters creativity and embraces new ideas. Employees need a structure they can follow to help them focus their ideas and apply their knowledge, expertise and experience to identify areas for profit improvement, process improvement and cost reduction.

One way to implement new idea systems is with Good Idea Boards. This process takes the traditional suggestion system out of the box and puts it where everyone can see on a series of white boards located prominently in your organization. Ideas are posted, brainstorming sessions address how best to implement an idea, and the employee responsible for the idea helps to pilot it on a trial basis in their department. If the idea is successful, it gets implemented and shared with other departments. Transparency and ownership are key to the process. Pride and recognition come with successful idea implementation, further fueling the idea generation process amongst peers.

## **Coaching for Innovation**

There are many other ways to introduce idea generating systems into an organization. Many hospitals are hiring Innovation Coaches to help tailor programs that address the unique challenges faced by their organization. Outside coaches help organizations to create high-performance cultures that empower employees and foster team behavior.

Using innovative brainstorming and team building sessions, idea and creativity workshops like VIE Healthcare's EXCITE! Program can dramatically increase savings while empowering employees. By focusing on an organization's needs and teaching employees how their ideas can have the greatest impact, innovation coaching changes the face of an organization's culture.

The process improves employee communication, motivation, morale, loyalty and work methods. It also tells employees that management are open to employee ideas and willing to act on them, increasing trust and leading to feelings of greater ownership and pride in the organization. Once started, the process builds on itself by empowering employees to take responsibility for initiating positive change and reducing costs in an organization.

“Organizations that don't consistently keep their finger on the pulse of employee engagement aren't maximizing the talent they have in place. It's about constantly communicating with your employees – sharing information as well as asking for their feedback – that can create a synergy within your department and across the organization,” says Lynn Pierce, RN, of the Leadership Institute.

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To change with the times, healthcare needs to divest itself of old hierarchical paradigms and look to the front lines – to the nurses, physicians and support staff – to drive innovation and change. Your employees have brilliant ideas. All you have to do is ask for them.

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