Employee Recognition

Satisfying Employees and Patients

By John Barry

Providing quality health care to patients depends on engaged employees. Communicating to employees how much their work is valued is an important but often overlooked way to maintain high levels of workforce satisfaction. Interacting with patients is very rewarding; however, the intense nature of the work can be very stressful. In addition, as insurance reimbursement assumes greater importance on the business side, health care employees are being asked to perform tasks more efficiently and with less resources. Demographics in the workplace are also changing. Generation Y employees want immediate acknowledgment that their performance on the job meets or exceeds expectations.

Employee recognition programs can play a central role in increasing employee engagement and satisfaction. Trinity Health System in Steubenville, Ohio, is one example of an organization that has developed a highly successful employee recognition program. Trinity Health System is licensed for 500 beds and includes two hospital campuses, a Cancer Center, an Occupational Health (Workcare) Center, 28 physician offices, the Prime Time Office on Aging, and a foundation. To acknowledge the efforts of its 1,927 employees, Trinity Health System created an employee recognition program that focuses on five best practices.

1. Create an Employee Reward and Recognition Team
Trinity Health System’s Employee Reward and Recognition Team is comprised of three to four managers and approximately 15 hourly employees. The group has designed employee recognition activities to align with the organization’s “Quest to Be the Best” program and standards of behavior. David Arnold, vice president of administrative services and employee reward and recognition team member, noted, “A formal approach to employee recognition is important. Without a structured program, all too often employee recognition falls by the wayside.” Each month, the Employee Reward and Recognition Team meets with managers to discuss what is going well in their areas of the organization. These conversations remind managers how valuable it is to recognize outstanding employees. Employee recognition takes time, but the benefits have been clear at Trinity Health System. Arnold commented, “Managers realize that it is worth taking the time to recognize their teams. The staff really responds positively to it.”

2. Measure How Employees Like to Be Rewarded
Trinity Health System gives a motivational assessment tool to every new hire. This evaluation identifies how each employee likes to receive recognition and whether they prefer to be rewarded monetarily or through praise. Don Ogden, director of behavioral medicine and employee reward and recognition team member, said, “The motivational assessment tool provides managers with useful information. For example, I hired an employee and learned that a particular candy bar is their favorite form of recognition. I also learned their favorite sports team and fast food restaurant.” The outcomes of the assessment influence how the organization designs recognition programs. For example, after discovering which sports teams employees liked, Trinity Health worked with professional teams in the area to secure discounted tickets for the staff.

3. Implement Non-Monetary Forms of Recognition
Two central components of Trinity Health System’s employee recognition program are the Employee of the Month and Employee of the Year awards. Judy Hare, human resources manager and employee reward and recognition team member, said, “We have run these programs for at least eight years and it’s a big honor for staff members. When a person is nominated for Employee of the Month, managers are asked to publicly comment about what makes the employee outstanding.” Trinity Health System makes it easy for managers to find specific examples of an employee’s exception performance, since recognition and accomplishments are recorded in the performance management system.

The Employee Reward and Recognition Team has also developed several other ways to reward staff in non-monetary ways.
For example, when managers do rounding and an employee is mentioned by a peer, thank you notes are sent to that individual’s department or home. In addition, each department celebrates employees’ years of service and birthdays. The “Wow Team” organizes social events like an annual picnic and holiday party, and doctors also donate prizes and rewards for employees. The Employee Reward and Recognition Team is currently working with the finance department so managers can issue gift shop vouchers to employees as a small token of appreciation.

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