# 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.

## 4 Tie Recognition to Employee Performance Management

Each month, managers at Trinity Health System are asked to send three thank you notes to staff for outstanding performance. This information is recorded in the performance management system and is incorporated into employee evaluations. One aspect of Trinity Health System's performance management system that has been very useful for employee recognition is the documents functionality. Documents, such as certificates of recognition, can be scanned and stored electronically. Kathie Pasquarella, director of education and training, commented, "When departments at Trinity Health System receive greater than a 75 percent HCAHPS score, the manager receives a certificate at a monthly management meeting from Fred Brower, president and CEO. That is shared with employees and displayed in their department."

## 5 Correlate Recognition Programs with Employee Satisfaction and Patient Experience

Each September, Trinity Health System asks its employees to complete a satisfaction survey and over time, the staff satisfaction ratings have improved. Don Ogden said, "There are a variety of reasons why employee satisfaction has increased, but I believe that the reward and recognition programs we have put in place have been a contributing factor to the improving scores." The prevailing wisdom is that a correlation exists between happy employees and better patient care. This has proven to be true at Trinity Health System. As employee satisfaction scores have increased, so have patient experience scores.

Employee recognition creates an important link between employees' day-to-day actions and broader organizational goals and objectives. As Trinity Health System's experience illustrates, there are significant benefits that result from tying employee recognition programs to employee evaluations. Although reward and recognition programs require a small time commitment, they pay major dividends in terms of greater staff engagement, employee satisfaction, and better patient experiences. ■

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