

What If— Long Term Care Organizations Used Long Term Strategies

By
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Too many healthcare organizations are using short-term fixes—Band-Aid solutions—that exacerbate the nursing shortage. It is long-term strategies such as building relationships and effective communication that deliver better results.

Many of the ideas in this article are explained in greater detail in my book, *Smart Nursing-How to Create a Positive Culture that Empowers and Retains Nurses*. Springer Publishing Company released it in March 2005.

Outcomes

Would you like to achieve the following outcomes?

- Stable nurse staffing
- High nurse productivity
- Profitability
- Intelligent risk management
- Reduction of waste

Ann O'Sullivan, MSN, RN, testifying before the Senate Governmental Affairs committee on behalf of the American Nurses' Association said:

"Nurses are, understandably, reluctant to accept positions in which they will face inappropriate staffing, be confronted by mandatory overtime, inappropriately rushed through patient care activities and face retaliation if they report unsafe practices."

Nurses are powerless. Even during nursing shortages, facilities waste nurses. They waste nursing time, ignore nursing potential, and destroy nursing spirit. Many organizations value tasks but ignore nurses' ideas and opinions.

Smart Nursing strategies can reverse such situations. We need a better mix of short and long term policies. We need trust and good relationships. We need positive work environments that enable nurses to be productive, energetic, and optimistic.

Long-term strategies prevail in staff-friendly cultures. Long-term strategies of respect, relationships, and collaboration provide an environment where staff can thrive.

Any group achieving long-term success, whether a work group, a family or a professional organization, will most likely have a positive culture. Positive cultures support members with personal and professional growth and success.

These long-term strategies can transform our current healthcare environment from chaos into an environment of consistent quality and safety.

Long-term strategies promote the "wholeness" of the healthcare system. They assist organizations to synergize components of good management practices: respect, simplicity, flexibility, integrity, communication, and professional culture. These components can only exist when organizations are willing to use long-term strategies to preserve them.

5 Strategies that will improve patient outcomes

1. Proactive leadership

Leaving the status quo feels uncomfortable, but continuing to practice the quick fix will only produce more of the same—a vicious cycle of staff turnover and wasted healthcare resources.

You may not be a perfect leader. That's OK. As you learn from your errors, you will become stronger, and you will find that your success attracts others who want to improve healthcare.

2. Patience and persistence

Be patient and persistent with yourself as well as with others. It takes time for people to change so you will need to have a long-term approach. Two ways to support people undergoing change are 1. Giving specific directions and 2. Being generous with praise.

3. Integrity

Multi-million dollar deals, as well as pressure for profitability, beckon you to stray from the integrity path. But, long-term opportunities for profitability disappear when companies fail to value honesty. Your credibility is marred if you fail to act with integrity and deliver adequate customer service. Your employees know if you act with integrity, and so do your patients.

4. Negotiation

Seek long-term agreements. One way to achieve this is to give up coercion.

Successful negotiators are skillful relationship builders. They nurture trust. They build bridges and bring people together instead of driving them apart. When you strengthen your clinical staff's negotiation skills, you strengthen your whole organization.

Clinical nurses who are good negotiators are able to bring nursing's clinical perspectives to management. This encourages management to develop staff-friendly solutions.

5. Coaching

From my experience, coaching is one of the best ways to develop your staff's potential. Coaching is flexible and customized to each staff member. Coaching results don't happen overnight, because meaningful change requires time. But with coaching, staff are more likely to use new skills, because they receive it in manageable bites.

Coaching is an investment. It takes time and patience. But results grow quickly once employees grow in competency, and contribute their best ideas to you.

When I left full time clinical work in 1995 to pursue my desire to “do what I can” to improve healthcare, I wasn’t sure what one person could do. Now that thirty articles have been published, a book, soon to be released has been written, and many presentations have been given to various audiences around the country, I know that healthcare staff, especially nurses, can learn to “speak up and make a difference.”

Why wait?

- Set your goals
- Make a plan
- Learn new skills
- Support other nurses
- Enjoy the process

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