

# Empowered People

## INSPIRED EMPLOYEES MAKING A DIFFERENCE

For Pitt County Memorial Hospital in Greenville, North Carolina, attracting patients is not a problem. It's been ranked in the top fifth percentile for patient satisfaction in the University Health System. In fact, it continues to grow at such an astounding rate that it now employs nearly 6,500 staff in its medical center, offering the only children's hospital and trauma center for the entire 29 counties of Eastern North Carolina.

An academic medical center, its nursing school trains more than 1,800 nurses each year. Doctors, physical therapists, occupational therapists, and other disciplines all train there as well. The challenge then, is not in competing with other hospitals for patients, but competing to get good people to stay and grow with the organization. To create a culture that engages hearts and minds so employees feel invested. They feel that the hospital is part of them and never want to leave.

"What makes us somewhat unique is that we are such a large medical center within a smaller rural environment," explains Brian Floyd, Executive Vice President of Operations, Pitt County Memorial Hospital. "Our systems and processes continue to evolve to deliver the best care for our patients. In an industry under health reformation, transparency and quality is a new standard among all hospitals. We want our differentiator to be more than the services we provide. We are in the people business, and we want to stand out as an organization that develops, encourages, and cares for people. This change is a critical part of our strategy."

The hospital's commitment as an employer of choice brought in initiatives around employee engagement. Structures were put in place to empower staff for greater participation in management decisions. Recognition programs were set out—26 in all. And yet, employees reported being dissatisfied. They didn't feel heard. Even with 26 recognition programs, they didn't feel appreciated and recognized.

"When I started to evaluate all of the recognition programs," explains Elizabeth Veliz, Director, Employee Retention and Recognition Services, Pitt County Memorial Hospital, "I wondered, 'Where is the employee involvement in the development of these programs?' I didn't see a whole lot of employee involvement in development, in evaluation, in measurement, in design, in implementation. So, I put out an all call to create a Recognition Committee."



**"We want people to come in everyday and go beyond their scope of work to deliver exceptional patient care. How are we going to get there? By creating a culture where employees are valued and appreciated for their contributions, and rewarded for their results."**

— ELIZABETH VELIZ, DIRECTOR, EMPLOYEE RETENTION AND RECOGNITION SERVICES, PITT COUNTY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

### A SEAT AT THE TABLE

The response was overwhelming. Employees wanted a voice. Two hundred people applied to the committee, which ended up consisting of 120 members, representing every division (clinical, non-clinical and corporate) of the hospital.

Immediately put to work, the committee divided into four sub-committees. A day-to-day committee focusing on initiatives that say "Thank you for the little things that we do that make up this great organization and the employees that work here." An above and beyond committee, that looked at how people were being recognized for outstanding performance. Years of service sought ways to celebrate and honor career milestones and the celebrations committee

was put in charge of hospital week.

Each group was given the same directive: Go out and gather feedback and make recommendations on how things could be done differently in each area.

"People showed up with impressive PowerPoint presentations," exclaims Veliz. "This is what we're recommending, this is the reason why, this is the impact we think it's going to make on the organization. Not on the employees, on the organization. I'm sitting there as an HR professional, and I'm saying to myself, 'Look at what our people will do when they are simply invited to the table.' Wow!"



**TOP, RECOGNITION COMMITTEE MEMBERS; MIDDLE, HOSPITAL STAFF: JENNIFER BYRD, KARA HOLMES, RHONDA GRIFFIN; BOTTOM, BRIAN FLOYD, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS, PITT COUNTY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL**

### PRESCRIPTION FOR SUCCESS

As the hospital's longtime service award partner, Veliz and team met with O.C. Tanner to learn more about recognition best practices. Quickly realizing an integrated solution was needed, the process was put out to bid.

Each prospect presented to the Recognition Committee, who recommended O.C. Tanner's proposal. Executive leadership agreed and 'Appreciation is the best medicine,' the hospital's recognition campaign and portal, were brought to life.

For the launch, 'appreciation stations' were set up where committee members encouraged handwritten 'doses of appreciation' and trained people on the concept of creating a culture of thank yous through using the appreciation portal. Dressed in 'Appreciation is the best medicine' scrub tops, they sat at the stations all week, in the evenings, and on the weekends, while also heading up mobile units throughout the hospital.

"Still, we faced a lot of challenges and a lot of pessimism. What's going to be the sustainability factor? How are you going to

get people involved? How are you going to get people engaged?" says Veliz.

"That's where the Recognition Committee members continue to make such a difference. They are out there in their day-to-day jobs when somebody says, 'So and so did this for me. It was so awesome.' They immediately prompt, 'Did you send an eCard? Should you nominate them for an award?'"

"People have stepped up to be a part of this vision because they see the outcomes. They know that it's work, but they also know that it's fun and they're going to be a part of something making a difference in the organization," says Tammy Wilkins Talent Acquisition Assistant, Pitt County Memorial Hospital.

"One of the things I've enjoyed most," explains committee member Debbie Dixon, "Has been being able to talk to employees to let them know that somebody does hear them. Their ideas do count and we're doing everything we can to implement them."

"It's truly incredible," says Veliz. "I now have the executive leadership saying to me, 'We have this idea, why don't you vet it with the recognition committee? Why don't you ask them?'"

### PAY IT FORWARD

Staff was engaged but what about leaders? Veliz and teammate Zedra Thiam went out to O.C. Tanner to get certified by the O.C. Tanner Learning Group. They brought recognition training back to the hospital and led mandatory manager recognition sessions.

Veliz received positive feedback on how recognition was helping empower managers just as much as employees. "The surveys that we've gotten back from these classes say things like, 'Finally, the tools we need.' They didn't realize how important recognition was. Frequent, specific and timely. They didn't realize it was that simple."

Additional feedback from Executive Leadership also led to the creation of recognition checkbooks. On the spot checks that allowed leaders to instantly award points—and have them submitted to the portal—when they noticed great work.

Next up: a compliments program that allows patients, families, and visitors to send staff their appreciation with 'Compliments to You' eButtons. And, as part of the ongoing communications and reinforcement plan, top recognizers will be called out themselves and recognized.

As Recognition Committee member and RN Phyllis Danza points out, "We have really positively influenced our fellow workers; there are more thank yous around. It's been motivating for others to not only receive but to give appreciation."

For the Recognition Committee the work (and fun) continues. A dashboard of metrics is waiting to be analyzed, which will give insight into the impact being made. What needs to be tweaked, improved, and added will be discussed and debated amongst the group.

"This is nearly a 900-bed hospital and I know the one patient that last week developed a urinary tract infection. I know who it was and where they were," concludes Floyd. "It's amazing how maniacal we've become in developing awareness, knowledge and process to achieve high quality. Imagine if we can be just as deliberate in fostering the energy of appreciation and what that does for our people." ❏



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**ECARDS HAVE BEEN SENT TO DATE**