

Leadership Academy Project Summary
2011-2012
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My project was aimed at improving staff morale and creating a more positive work environment. The goal was to create a harmonious team resulting in strong healthy relationships. Improving staff morale and increasing job satisfaction within the workplace proved to be a very challenging and enlightening project. Through a series of trial and error with planned events and surveys it became evident that this project would not come to a completion at the end of the year, but would continue to evolve and change as I discovered what would work and those things that did not work. Going into the project, I read many books on the subject in order to provide me with some knowledge of what others had learned. Among them: "Make Their Day" by Cindy Ventrice, "Employee Morale" by David Bowles and Cary Cooper, "1001 Ways to Reward Employees" by Bob Nelson, PH.D., "Building a High Morale Workplace" by Anne Bruce, and "301 Ways to Have Fun at Work."

The benefits were two-fold. Not only did I as a leader get to know the team better, but the team was able to get to know me on a more personal level. This was invaluable in building relationships. Communication was vitally important. Not only with encouraging staff to share, but learning how they best liked to be communicated with and what they were comfortable in sharing. Building a strong team also required disciplining and in some circumstances terminating those individuals who were not pulling their weight or otherwise bringing the team down through their negative habits.

In planning of the events, the staff education coordinator was very helpful in advertising, taking pictures and promoting the activities. The Director of Health Services also played a role in promoting the events and making the team aware of happenings. It was also important to continually ask for feedback. Weekly meetings were set up with each supervisor, staff educator, Director of Health Services. Communication was done in person at these meetings and anything was open for discussion.

The challenges in initiating this project surfaced right at the beginning. Time was the biggest obstacle. Time was needed to plan the events, send out personal cards for each employee's birthday and anniversary, and also to do daily rounding to interface with each and every employee working on the shift. Learning to draw out employees who are intimidated by the Director of Nursing was also a challenge. Trying to erase the fears of seeing me coming as something is wrong is proving to be ongoing. Communication is paramount in this instance. Being open and honest in communications upfront to allay any fears is important to get and keep communications flowing. Overcoming these challenges is still a struggle. Consciously making an effort every day to interface has to be made a priority or it will not happen. I also conducted two surveys during the course of the year. The first survey showed that the staff did have concerns in r/t low staff morale. The second survey was completely different. It was more positive and upbeat. Interestingly, the second survey had a smaller return on the surveys. I can only surmise

that the staff was more content and did not feel like filling it out. I experimented with yet another survey aimed at getting to know the individual. Unfortunately this survey was unsuccessful as I only received a total of three back.

Planning “outside of work” fun activities proved to be unpopular. During the first employee staff scavenger hunt, the night shift was in great attendance and had a good time. The second scavenger hunt failed d/t lack of enough participants. The second event was a pet picnic. Again there was a lack of significant participation. The feedback given was that most employees were unwilling to give up their free time, especially a weekend when they only get two off per month.

One of the three leadership behaviors that was critical for me to learn to develop and evolve with the group was being able to accept constructive criticism and ask for feedback. It was vital that when an activity “tanked” to not get caught up in feeling defeated, but to be able to stay “OK, good to know” and move on and try another approach. It is important to be brave and take risks. Communication with the team is so important. Asking the questions, “What would you like to see done in r/t staff morale”, “What ideas do you have?” “What changes would you like to see?” and of course, listening. Rewarding individuals for their contributions was also challenging. Not everyone wants or needs a trophy, etc. But just being vigilant about saying, “good job, way to go or that was great”, was what people wanted to hear. Being appreciated and hearing good things is invaluable. Being seen and acknowledged is immeasurable.

I learned to implement these behaviors, (and am still practicing this skill), by carrying around three poker chips in my pocket. Every time I visited one of the units and had face time with the employees working, I would transfer the chip into the opposite pocket. Setting up weekly meetings with my direct department supervisors is invaluable in giving them face time and a chance to give me feedback or let me know any of their concerns. This in turn has given me the ability to practice, practice, and practice listening skills.

My plans for the future are to continue what I have started. I will continue with rounding and talking to each employee. I still do not have this perfected, but never stop trying. I will continue with the birthday and anniversary cards to each employee. I think it is important to be recognized and this seems to be greatly appreciated. I will look into creating some activities for during work time. Maybe plan some potlucks, “dog days”, craft sharing, etc. I am sure the staff will be willing to come up with some of their own ideas that we can work on together. I am also going to try to plan activities specific to shifts. For example: “Breakfast with Nancy” after the night shift is over. It is also important to note that not everyone is a “joiner” or enjoys staff activities and this is OK too. These individuals still need to be acknowledged and know that they are appreciated also.