

4

tips for employee engagement

1

Recognize the value and benefits of employee engagement as a retention strategy

One of the most significant challenges senior care providers face is attracting and retaining employees who are engaged and invested in the work and success of the organization. And, of course, unwanted turnover is incredibly costly and has an extended ripple effect, impacting almost every outcome.

When you decide to make employee engagement a priority, you open a direct channel to improving business results. Research has solidly proven that an organization's level of employee engagement directly impacts organizational outcomes, including improved:

- ❖ Customer experience
- ❖ Quality of care
- ❖ Employee retention
- ❖ Safety and productivity
- ❖ Financial results

Proactive leaders take deliberate steps to firmly establish a culture of engagement. They use finely tuned methods to listen to and communicate with employees. By using multiple sources of information, you extend the eyes and ears of your organization and avoid falling victim to tunnel vision. You stay "in the know" about your employees' experience. In addition to responding to real-time needs, you can stay alert to the weak signals that serve as early warning indicators for needed change.

Through continuous cycles of listening, learning and improving your workplace culture, you increase the emotional connection employees feel towards their work and to your organization. Engagement is the feeling of doing meaningful work and being valued for that work.

It's this emotional connection or feeling of engagement that impacts two very important things:

- ❖ An employee's feeling of commitment, which means enhanced loyalty and ultimately increased retention. And as a bonus,
- ❖ It impacts an employee's ability to focus on their work and increases their motivation to put their best foot forward, which results in high performance.

2

Communication is key to encouraging participation

Employees want to know and understand your organizational priorities. As you focus on employee engagement, they will want to learn about the bigger purpose and be included in the process. The facility management team should clearly communicate their focus on, and commitment to, engagement:

- ❖ Establish a common message so that facility managers are consistent in their communication about your commitment to employee engagement.
- ❖ Provide managers with a set of common talking points to convey a unified message.
- ❖ Prior to conducting an engagement survey, schedule and conduct employee meetings to share your plan, explain the purpose of the engagement survey and answer any questions employees might have.
- ❖ Throughout your survey window, encourage survey participation to optimize your response rate.
- ❖ After the survey, communicate the summarized results of the survey and talk with your employees about improvement plans.

3

Ensure accountability by clarifying roles and responsibilities

To shape a culture of engagement, roles and responsibilities must be clear. To ensure accountability for advancing your engagement strategy:

- ❖ Assign a project manager or “champion” to assume ownership for driving the overall implementation of your strategy. This role is often assigned to a Human Resources representative, the Quality Coordinator or Staff Development Specialist. This does not mean this person does all the work — rather, this is the person who organizes and coordinates the plan. Although the champion serves as the point person for monitoring, tracking and evaluating progress, facility leaders must retain ownership of the facility’s engagement strategy.
- ❖ The Administrator or Executive Director needs to set clear expectations for all members of the management team for actively taking part in implementing engagement activities.
- ❖ The management team (typically the Administrator and department heads) must demonstrate visible sponsorship by embracing the value of engagement as a strategic priority. Team members must be willing and able to work cooperatively together and hold each other accountable to shape a positive workplace culture.
- ❖ The management team, along with Human Resources, should evaluate your workforce processes to ensure they are producing the desired outcomes. This includes processes such as how you hire and onboard new employees, how you provide performance feedback, and how you reward and recognize employees for good work.
- ❖ Frontline supervisors have a tremendous influence on the day-to-day experience of their team. They need to demonstrate engaging actions and behaviors as they communicate, coach and interact with their employees.

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4

Be clear on what you want to achieve

In order to build commitment to engagement, you need to clarify what you are committing to! Simply saying “we want to improve employee engagement” doesn’t provide any understanding as to why this is important to you or your employees. It’s helpful to get very clear on what you see as the value of employee engagement in your facility. Here are some examples of what some skilled nursing facility leaders have identified as their desired outcomes:

- ❖ Employee engagement means our employees are highly motivated to create an exceptional experience for residents AND have a desire to consider our company as their career destination.
- ❖ Employee engagement is an individual’s sense of purpose and focused energy, evident to others in their display of personal initiative, effort and persistence, and directed toward organizational goals.

It’s also helpful to get clear on specific goals and metrics that will help you monitor your progress. If you don’t already have a formal goal, here are some examples:

- ❖ Increase employee retention by [X%] by [date] by embedding a leadership system that fosters employee engagement.
- ❖ Decrease voluntary employee turnover by [X%] by [date] by creating a work environment that compels people to stay and give their best.
- ❖ Improve our desirability as a preferred workplace by cultivating an engaging work environment, as measured by a [number of points] increase in our facility employee engagement score by [date].

If you choose to participate in the CMP Grant opportunity, you will be able to establish a baseline of data and use the resources to increase engagement over time.