



Three Key Engagement Drivers for Health Care Providers

BY PATTI MCEWEN AND CHRISTOPHER MULLIGAN



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Engaged employees are committed to their work, go above and beyond their basic job expectations, and want to play a key role in growing their organization. We call this “discretionary effort.” But does engagement matter when it comes to physicians and allied health professionals?

The answer is a resounding yes! The Center for Healthcare Governance put it this way: “Physician engagement can be empirically linked to, and a strong predictor of, decreased turnover, better clinical outcomes, increased patient satisfaction, higher profitability and market expansion.”

With operating margins in the single digit percentages, it’s clear how increased engagement of physicians and allied health care professionals is so important. This is especially true in larger health care organizations where the benefits of increased engagement levels, or lack thereof, are magnified by thousands of people.

One such organization is Envision Physician Services, a national physician group with more than 20,000 employees, operating as a business group within Envision Healthcare. Envision Physician Services has contracts with

hospitals all over the country, creating the relationship between health care providers and physician groups in specialty services like emergency medicine, anesthesiology, hospital medicine, women's and children's services, radiology and surgery. With an organization as diverse as this, it's obviously difficult to know exactly what engages this varied group of employees and adheres them to the overarching culture of Envision.

Patti McEwen, Envision Physician Services' Chief Human Resource Officer, describes the history of engagement within the organization this way: "Our commitment to understand what matters most to our employees dates back to before our merger as Envision Physician Services. Both of our legacy organizations, Emcare and Sheridan Healthcare, had a history of measuring engagement through a formalized engagement survey process."

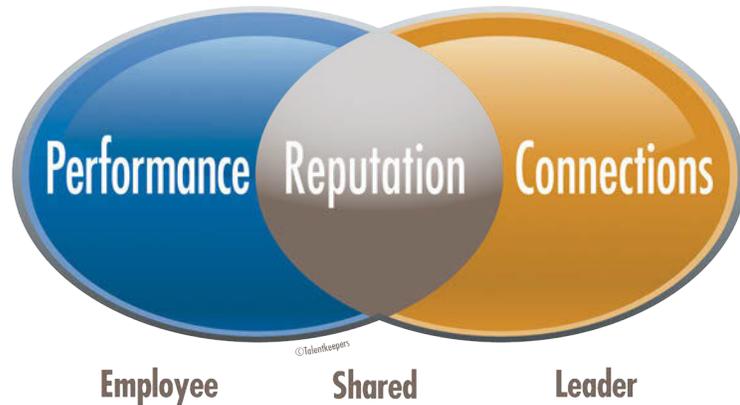
In 2014, McEwen was the HR leader for Sheridan Healthcare and her team decided their best strategy would be to conduct a survey with their physicians. "Our goal was to identify what engaged our physicians the most, and what motivated them to stay with the organization."

In 2014 and again in 2016, Sheridan Healthcare partnered with TalentKeepers to implement a survey to highlight the factors of engagement. "The highest scores for engagement were the location, camaraderie and the people they worked with," McEwen explained. "But the one that stood out to us was the leadership component. It was important for the physicians to feel like they had great leadership from the more remote leaders at the corporate level. They didn't feel as connected to or motivated by the corporate side as we would have liked."

This proved to be a bit of a disappointment for McEwen and her team, but not surprising, because the physician groups are typically working on their own without much direct involvement from the corporate center. They related more directly to where and

CAREER GROWTH AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Elements Required for Career Growth



Who is Responsible for Each Element?

whom they went to work with every day than they did with the organization that supported them from the top down. After the initial onboarding period ended, it was often difficult to maintain that connection between parent organization and daily practice.

Leaders matter

The survey showed that most of the physician leaders were effective at the local level in terms of driving engagement, but less effective at connecting the corporate vision and cascading corporate communication related to our programs and initiatives. They operated in their own smaller spheres, in other words.

The opportunity, as McEwen saw it, was to connect these spheres with the overall organization. "It's one thing to say, 'We're changing your timekeeping system tomorrow and you have to follow a whole new workflow,' and a much better thing to be able to tell them how, when, and why this is happening, and how it will benefit them. That was a big gap for us to have to bridge."

What McEwen and the physician leadership team figured out is that the leader is critically important to the initiative. "Moving forward, as Envision Physician Services, our leaders have four

roles to play," she said. "The medical role they're obviously good at. It's what they have studied, trained and worked for over the course of many years. Quality of care is obviously their top goal on this front. Second, at the local level, they have to manage their staff (doctors and nurses) and work with the Envision Physician Services' staff that handles the administrative and HR side. The third key role is to manage the financial success of the practice. The fourth piece is leadership and interaction with the hospital or clinic site and the leadership staff at that particular facility. In other words, the success of this leader is huge for the business and for the overall organization because that leader is the face of everything we do."

Given all these factors, finding physicians who can manage all of this is often challenging. They must lead a successful practice and serve as the face of the company at the local level. For Envision Physician Services, finding, promoting, and engaging such leaders is a clear market advantage.

Career growth discussions

There is an emerging importance of career for physicians, as more are working in large organizations rather than individual practices. It is especially important to make sure

career paths have been created within the organization and then tasking leaders to be responsible for these discussions. We've created a model that clearly identifies responsibilities for both the leader and the employee in these career growth discussions.

Organizations without robust career paths and clear accountability for career growth discussions may find they are at a disadvantage when recruiting new talented physicians and allied health professionals.

McEwen and her team addressed the career growth issue first with their physicians, developing an "Emerging Leaders Program," which identifies up-and-coming physicians that could be leaders at the local or national level. These potential leaders enter an eighteen-month management development program which has been successful at so many levels that we've recently implemented similar programs for existing clinical leaders, allied health leaders, and administrative, and executive staff.

Communicate and take action

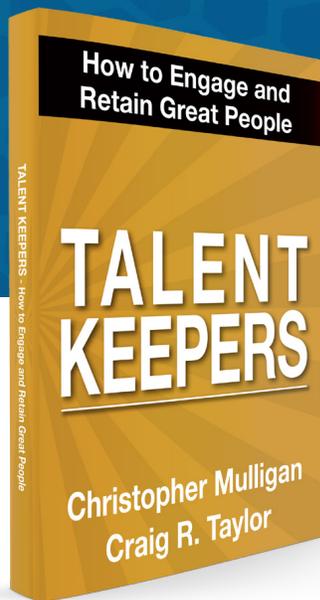
For many large organizations, the ability of field leadership teams to effectively explain and support decisions made by senior leaders at corporate is crucial to creating a culture of engagement. This goal is possible in any organization, and it's only one of many effective components of the engagement strategy McEwen has helped put in place at Envision Physician Services. "All of this has led us to schedule more opportunities for our senior leadership to visit site locations on a regular basis. They used to go once a year, or even never. Now they visit frequently," she says.

As a result of the organizational buy-in, McEwen and her team are seeing dramatic results from their first two surveys with TalentKeepers. They have created new and effective initiatives that help employees and leaders all across their remarkably diverse organization, and it has made their culture more cohesive overall. Individual leaders are encouraged to

discuss their engagement survey results with their teams, ask more questions, and create action plans to address opportunity areas. Those leaders who do this have, on average, 84 percent of their teams engaged versus just 63 percent team engagement for leaders who do not, a significant difference!

McEwen and her team have clearly seen the business results of their engagement efforts, "The practices with the most engaged leaders are the best performing practices in the organization." Administering surveys on a consistent basis to measure progress, drive accountability and identify new areas of opportunity will remain a key competitive advantage for the organization.

Patti McEwen is Chief Human Resource Officer at Envision Physician Services, a national hospital based physician group of over 20,000 employees. Christopher Mulligan is CEO and founder of TalentKeepers, a leading provider of employee engagement and retention solutions for over 17 years.



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