

Baptist Health Care: Where Staff Retention Drives Patient Satisfaction



Ask whether there is a link between training and retention, and most managers and human resources professionals will say, "Yes!" Ask them to describe that link, and they will tell you that well-designed and well-chosen training enables employees to understand and perform their jobs better while increasing job satisfaction.

But training the employee is only the starting point for retention. Training managers why and how to keep their people satisfied is as or more important. This is the specialty of Brian Jones, director of people development for Baptist Health Care (BHC).

In the mid 1990s Baptist Health Care was the largest nongovernmental employer in the Florida panhandle, with five hospitals, a nursing home, a mental health agency, and 5,500 employees. It was providing excellent care, but there were problems: low staff morale and consequent high turnover affected customer service, and customer dissatisfaction was hurting market share. In 1995 the concepts that patients are customers and hospitals need to be concerned about what they think were relatively new. But Baptist got a wake-up call when its flagship Baptist Hospital in Pensacola ranked close to the bottom in a national survey of patient satisfaction.

Seeking to make major improvements in customer perceptions, Baptist's leaders benchmarked Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company and other renowned hospitality companies. They learned, among other lessons, that employee satisfaction and retention are requisite to improving customer satisfaction.

To improve employee satisfaction, Baptist launched its first-ever leadership development program for both new and existing managers. "A key segment of our leadership training is called 'You Are the CRO'—the chief retention officer," observes Jones. "We make clear through our training that our managers are personally responsible for turnover rates and employee satisfaction, and we reinforce the message through performance measurement. Then we give them the insights and tools they need to maximize retention."

One of the keys to the program has been dramatizing and then correcting what Jones calls "spatial blindness—the belief that 'everyone is just like me.'" To eliminate spatial blindness, managers must first understand them-

selves and then understand how others differ. Baptist kicks off the leadership program with a half-day module on personality differences, launched with the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®)* assessment.

"The first thing we do is show our students their own personality type, as indicated by the assessment, and give them a twelve-page description of type," says Jones.

"More often than not, they are amazed by how insightful and accurate the description of their type is. Then they are hooked. That's all we need to open their minds to the fact that their individual staff members may have very different preferences in terms of work styles, communication, training and recognition."

Positive results followed quickly. By 2000 BHC's Customer Satisfaction Team had won the prestigious RIT/USA Today Quality Cup for health care. Since then Baptist has placed 15th on Fortune magazine's list of the 100 Best Companies to Work For, made Training magazine's Training Top 100 list, and been named to CIO magazine's Web Business 50 Award list. And in 2003 Baptist Hospital was one of only seven Baldrige Award winners. The hospital is now ranked first in the nation in customer satisfaction. So many health care organizations from around the country asked to visit and benchmark Baptist that it established the separate Baptist Health Care Leadership Institute, which conducts a two-day seminar each month.

"Our hiring process is extremely rigorous. We look for intelligence, integrity, sense of humor, and ability to learn; when we make a decision to hire, we know we want to retain that individual," observes Jones. "That is where personality type comes in. We do not consider personality type in our selection decisions because we do not consider it to be a predictor of success, but we do ask our managers to be cognizant of it when they seek to maximize productivity and minimize turnover."

Baptist recently employed its Cascade Learning approach to have its managers spread type awareness throughout the organization. In exercises throughout the organization staff members assessed their own type and learned what it says about their preferences for work style, learning style and recognition. In the course of this exercise,

managers got a better sense of the types or personalities they are dealing with. And they had the opportunity to ask their staff to help them tailor jobs, communications and rewards to the preferences of each of them.

A key feature of the Myers-Briggs® section of our leadership training program is training our managers how to recognize the personality types of their staff and how to utilize those insights.

“So, for example, each manager knows how their employees prefer to be rewarded and recognized. Instead of just assuming that everyone would welcome public recognition, managers now know who likes it and who dreads it. Rewards can be tailored, such as giving Chicago Cubs memorabilia to a Cubs fan. But recognition and rewards are just the beginning. We encourage and enable our managers to treat their people as individuals in many ways. We want our people to know that this is not like any other organization that they’ve ever worked for. Just as we manage our patient care to [Malcolm] Baldrige standards, we want to manage our employee care to the same level. We know what they want and give it to them.”

“Human Resources takes type preference into account in determining whether particular individuals are more comfortable on the front desk, with continuous customer contact, or behind the scenes. We have switched people among shifts—Extraverts toward the day shift and Introverts toward the night shift—and made everyone more satisfied in the process.”

It is the explanation and dramatization of personality differences that makes this effort possible. “When we use the Myers-Briggs assessment in our management training, they get it. And when we reinforce the message in our quarterly meetings, they keep it and continue to apply it.”

The Finance department has taken type to heart to the extent that many staff post their type description on their door. Based on type knowledge, Stephanie Collins knows she can count on one of her direct reports to be creative and to liven up the office. “However, I also know that when I have to assign something she does not like to do, I have to give her very specific instructions.” Dave

Woods speaks of a direct report who has a “caretaker” personality. “He is so conscientious that I have at times encouraged him to put his work aside and attend committee meetings outside the department. He is so good at it that he was put in charge of the companywide Bright Ideas [employee suggestion] program and became the first nonclinician ever selected as employee of the year.”

Russ Schreiner is a manager at Gulf Coast Enterprises, a BHC affiliate that evolved from a community mental health service agency into the largest employer of persons with disabilities in North Florida. “So, the people we provide care for are our employees,” observes Schreiner. “We participate in Baptist University and receive the full leadership development training program. The use of the Myers-Briggs assessment has been particularly valuable to us. With 23 managers in five states, we needed help in our interactions. In one case, a senior manager was able to say, ‘I am an Introvert; that is why I have been less visible than a lot of you expect. Going forward, I will be as visible as you need me to be. It’s just that I will have to work harder to do it.’ We also used it to help us redistribute duties among the three top people in the organization.”

What has this effort meant in terms of retention? Turnover at Baptist Hospital has declined every year since 1997, from 27.2 percent to 13.9 percent. Baptist Health Care has clearly taken the MBTI tool and type theory to heart. “Work style preference is now explicitly mentioned in our corporate diversity statement,” reports Jones. “And our people have shown real creativity in the application of Myers-Briggs® insights to enhance teamwork, management, and job performance.”

By now more than 6,000 top health care leaders from 48 states have attended a Baptist Health Care Leadership Institute seminar. Jones, who is responsible for both external and internal training, explains in those seminars the use and importance of the MBTI tool. Since the endorsement comes from the nation’s 15th best place to work, with the highest level of patient satisfaction in the country, the seminar participants just may listen.

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