



Healthcare CHROs—Carving Pathways to Workforce Engagement

Posted by Curt Lucas

This is the first in a series of four posts on the priorities of the healthcare chief human resources officer (CHRO).

Employee engagement is a vital strategy for any organization that seeks to achieve success, according to the [Gallup](#) organization, which has measured employee engagement since 2000.



Engaging healthcare employees, clinicians, managers, executives and board members is more than an annual feel-good HR project. Instead, engagement is a strategic initiative that drives clinical, financial and operational performance and continuous improvement throughout the year. It's the outcome of how an HCO interacts with its stakeholders to drive business and clinical results.

HCOs are limited in their ability to produce empowerment, satisfaction and motivation. Ultimately, engagement is up to clinicians, executives, managers and employees who must choose how involved they want to be in their work and the HCO's mission and vision.

Chief healthcare human resources executives (CHROs) can support engagement by creating a workplace environment conducive to helping employees, managers, clinicians and executives make choices that will drive positive, enterprise-wide clinical and business performance.

Unfortunately, rates of employee engagement have hardly budged in more than 15 years, according to [Gallup](#). Slightly more than 30 percent of U.S. employees are engaged—meaning that they're involved, enthusiastic and committed to their workplace and work. World-wide, the results are even more troubling with only 13 percent of employees defined by Gallup as engaged.

Still, there's reason for optimism. HCOs already making progress on workforce engagement include Intermountain Healthcare, Adventist Health System, Bon Secours Health System and the Mayo Clinic. These HCOs found inspiration in the following expert opinions:

Strategy: Make engagement a core business and clinical strategy that focuses on finding engaged employees, clinicians, managers and executives and then keeping them engaged throughout the employment relationship.

Accountability: Focus engagement on business (operational and financial) and clinical results. Employees, clinicians, managers and executives are most engaged when an HCO insists on accountability and workers are able to observe and measure the outcomes of their performance.

Alignment: Build engagement by aligning the HCO's clinical and business goals with the career and performance goals of employees, clinicians, managers and executives. CHROs can help align individual goals with HCO goals through frequent communications aimed at both individuals and groups.

Insight: Provide employees, clinicians, managers and executives with the information and insight they need to understand how what they achieve each day in the workplace influences the HCO's goals and priorities.

Development: Commit to employee, clinician, management, executive and board development. Specifically, anchor development programming in learning, education, training and performance and succession planning.

Healthcare C-suites and boards are understandably suspicious of the push toward workforce engagement. Among the objections CHROs must overcome are the following:

- **ROI-itis:** C-Suits and boards are eager to learn about the return on investment (ROI) of workforce engagement. The CHRO response: Engagement is a long-term initiative that doesn't translate into immediate bottom-line results, as much as sustained clinical, financial and operational performance.
- **Blast from the Past:** C-Suite and boards have listened to every program pitch imaginable--from employee involvement, motivation and empowerment, to theories of contingency, systems and chaos. The CHRO response: Previous programs may have failed because they were ancillary to organizations' core business. Engagement is a planned clinical and business strategy with expected and measured clinical and business results.
- **Way Too Busy:** C-Suites and boards worry that workers who are already overwhelmed by issues like value-based reimbursement, population health and cybersecurity will push back on engagement initiatives. The CHRO response: Engagement is far from an add-on. Instead, it calls for the following actions:
Measure performance and hold people
 - Deliver the communications needed to align each person's actions with the HCO's goals.
 - Pursue development activities needed to ensure clinical and business success.
 - Commit the time, tools, training and funds required to sustain engagement.
 - Reward engagement behavior with verbal and written acknowledgement, awards and prizes.
 - Transition from standard, one-shot performance appraisals to clear, specific and ongoing performance feedback.
 - Demonstrate how personal values are in sync with the HCO's stated values and guiding principles.
 - Develop trust, respect and emotional intelligence within managers, executives and clinical leaders.
 - Create engagement champions who exhibit caring a personal interest in others, including a willingness to elicit their ideas and advice.
 - Forge opportunities for employees, clinicians, managers and executives to practice integrity and team-based collaboration. Doing so will help everyone in the HCO develop a passion for high-quality care, innovation and serving the needs of patients, families and consumers.

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InveniasPartners, a leading C-Suite healthcare executive and board search, assessment and talent management consulting firm, serves health systems, hospitals, academic medical centers, medical groups and payers through offices in Chicago, Los Angeles, Salt Lake City, St. Louis and Princeton.

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Additional Resources:

[Core Leadership: A Model for Enhancing Employee Engagement \(Intermountain Healthcare\)](#)

[Best Places to Work in Healthcare: Bon Secours Virginia](#)

[Adventist Health System Wins 2015 Gallup Great Workplace Award](#)

[Strengthening Employee Engagement with Social Media at Mayo Clinic](#)

[Texas Health Resources](#)

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