Becoming an Employer of Choice

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Becoming an Employer of Choice - Introduction
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Recruitment and Orientation - Starting off right
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Respect - Intergenerational collaboration
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Retention Failure - Its true impact on your bottom line
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Becoming an Employer of Choice

Employee recruitment and retention and improved patient outcomes are two key issues in healthcare. One strategy—becoming an employer of choice—may provide the solutions to both.

An employer of choice is a firm whose employment policies and Human Resource management practices give it an edge over its competitors in recruiting and retaining appropriately skilled workers and optimizing their productivity while maintaining or increasing their profitability and market shares. (Anderberg and Froeschle 3). Branham (57) states “an employer of choice recruits and engages talent through practices that address both tangibles and intangibles, focus on the long term as well as the short term, and are tailored to the organization.” The tangibles Branham refers to include pay, benefits, pensions, while intangibles include work–life balance, supervisor behavior, trust in leaders, and work climate/culture. How many healthcare employers could call themselves employers of choice?

Job satisfaction reports emerging from surveys of the current healthcare workforce suggest not many. Lowe (2002) has noted that “healthcare workers have to cope with considerable dissonance between what they want in a job and what they actually have.” (50). Citing a nationally representative survey of employees conducted in 2000, he noted that Canadians value respect, interesting work, good communication, a sense of accomplishment, work–life balance and opportunities for skill development in their jobs. These workplace characteristics were valued higher than pay. Work overload and job stresses were revealed as serious problems especially in the healthcare workforce. Healthcare workers scored lowest of all employment sectors on measurements of commitment to their employers. The results of this survey were seen to provide explanation for poor retention rates in healthcare workplaces.

The recruitment and retention of healthcare employees presents unprecedented challenges to employers because of population demographics. The looming retirements of the baby boom generation will mean a decline in skilled and experienced staff just as that same generation will be placing increased demands on healthcare. It is a challenge to replace these skilled staff due to the sheer numbers of baby boomers. This limited supply of healthcare staff coinciding with increased demand will challenge healthcare leaders in the next several decades to sustain necessary employee numbers. The alarm has certainly been heard with regard to nursing staff, but Numerof and Abrams (1-8) note several other professions that will see the same impact, most notably pharmacy, respiratory therapy, and occupational therapy.

Competition for skilled healthcare staff from the private sector and other work environments further complicates recruitment and retention for healthcare employers. Pharmaceutical companies, for example, recruit nurses and pharmacists away from the publicly funded system, not necessarily for better pay and benefits, but more often for the promise of better working conditions, more opportunities for career growth and better “perks”.

Becoming an employer of choice has been the solution for non-health
sector industries in which competition for skilled knowledge or skill based professionals has been stiff. Lenaghan and Eisner (101) note the competitive advantage afforded to employers with the Employer of Choice designation. Lowe (50) suggests that becoming an employer of choice, in the healthcare setting, means employers must respond to what workers want in a job, finding ways to align work values with organizational goals.

The bonus for health employers is that transforming the workplace into a quality work environment also improves patient outcomes; just as in the business sector productivity improves. Lowe (2002:54) cites research on healthcare professionals which links healthy work environments, employee well being and organizational performance. He notes “Hospitals that produce these working conditions show improvements in staff recruitment and retention as well patient outcomes.” The US Agency for Health Research and Quality (AHRQ) has linked working conditions to safety-related patient outcome (Lowe 2005:60). Further Canadian data from 2004 Adverse Events Study recommended significant improvements in patient safety can be made by modifying the work environment of healthcare professionals (Lowe 2005:60).

The concept of branding workplaces as an employer of choice, as well as branding in a broader sense of positive recognition in the marketplace, has more recently emerged as a recruiting strategy. First impressions create a perceptual set through which employees view their workplace. There is no doubt that a name that is both recognizable and known as a centre of excellence is valued to the potential job seeker. Both “Mayo Clinic” and “Sick Kids” are examples of healthcare workplaces with brand recognition that includes a reputation for excellence. Having a reputation of being an employer of choice has been shown to be one of the most effective recruitment strategies for employers of knowledge workers (Horwitz, Heng and Quazi 39: Lenaghan and Eisner 101). Lowe (2002:52) suggests that healthcare workers are knowledge workers. But what about once new employees walk through the door on their first day of work? Engaging new employees via a relevant and interesting orientation process captures interest, builds commitment, and creates enthusiasm. In our first article, “Starting out Right”, Mary Johnson explores how workplace branding as employer of choice links to effective employee orientation and ultimately influences retention.

Quality workplaces appear to be highly dependent on the relationships within the environment. Branham (67) notes employee’s relationships with their managers have more influence than any other factor on employee’s decisions to leave their jobs. Howe (52-54) describes five general traits of organizations that achieve a best employer status, based on analyzing employee data from 330 Canadian organizations. All five traits are related to people practices. Similarly, Lowe describes the importance of creating a high-trust workplace. He asks “How does the level of trust within the public service itself affect employees’ level of engagement and the quality of the services they provide? “ (2006: 26). He further asserts: “A crucial insight for public sector managers is that a high-trust workplace is high-performing because employees are more than engaged – they are passionate about their work and feel inspired to further their organization’s goals” (2006: 26). He cites numerous examples in the business literature demonstrating the strategic advantages of high-trust cultures. Based on over 20 years of research, The Great Place to Work Institute (GPTW) has documented the strategic value of high-trust workplaces. The model it promotes is based on trust. Jacki Stanley, in
here article “The Job is More Than a Paycheque” has provided an insightful examination of one workplace within the context of the GPTW model.

Respect must be at the foundation of relationships within healthcare work environments to accommodate the varied values of different demographic cohorts. Lenaghan and Eisner note that the difference in the attitudes, values and needs of each generation of worker complicates workforce dynamics (100). The baby boom generation and its values have no doubt dominated all work environments for many years, simply due to its numbers. Recognition that there are similarities and differences across generations is a key retention issue. Managers must recognize that qualities that have allowed retention of “boomer” employees may not apply to the emerging younger workforce. Wrangler Hamm has illuminated some the issues to consider in managing relationships across generations in his article “Intergenerational Collaboration”.

“The greatest drivers of retention are related to the way managers interact with their employees.”

The cost of employee turnover is well documented – but not necessarily common knowledge among managers. Best employers, employers of choice, quality workplaces – regardless of the label, all put a premium on delivering people programs. Leaders who are positive about such people programs – rather than viewing them as a waste of time and money – differentiate best employers from others (Howe 53). Best employers, as noted previously, improve retention rates. An understanding of the costs of failing to retain healthcare employees is convincing of the value of employer of choice programs. In “Retention Failure: Its true impact on your bottom line” Chelsea Platzke outlines some startling data on the costs to employers due to employee turnover.

Strong leadership is essential to bring about positive changes in healthcare work environments (Lowe 2002:55). Cultural transformation must be the focus and needs to be embraced, but it is culture that is most difficult to change. Leary-Joyce (2004) encourages all managers, whether senior, middle or front-line, to make their own work unit or team a “centre of excellence” in people practices, since the cultural shift depends on interpersonal relationships. Numerof and Abrams (2003) describe the infrastructure necessary to grow and mentor great managers with the leadership qualities required to develop and sustain employer of choice environments. They provide a blueprint for becoming an employer of choice in healthcare settings (chapter 7) that describes six pillars that support patient care effectiveness and that are necessary to attract and retain quality employees. Branham (2005:67) insists that managers bear the greatest responsibility in becoming employers of choice. Senior leaders, human resource leaders and employees also have a role. But, the greatest drivers of retention are related to the way managers interact with their employees. In our final article, Natalie Beiberdorf provides many innovative, sometimes provocative, actions to take to begin transforming your workplace into a great place to work.

Works cited:
Recruitment and Orientation

Starting off right

Employee recruitment takes on many forms. From word of mouth to local help wanted ads to international career fairs, each involves marketing your organization as the place of choice to begin or continue a career.

Branding and marketing is most often associated with the retail and service industries. A company will brand itself as honest and trustworthy in order to effectively market its products.

The American Marketing Association defines a brand as a “name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from other sellers.” Rather than be defined by a particular product or service, a brand defines the company itself.

Branding isn’t simply convincing the public to try your product over the competition’s product, but to see you as the only viable choice. It delivers a clear message, confirms your credibility, motivates the customer, and most importantly, builds loyalty. To develop a successful brand, the customers’ or clients’ needs and wants must be well understood in order to be met. It requires significant investment to research, define and build a brand, which is essentially a promise to the customer. Customers should be able to count on a consistent experience every time they come into contact with the products or services.

The “Corporate Eye” says that branding is the most important part of business.

When consumer dollars are tight and marketing dollars are being cut back, developing a brand that fosters a loyal customer base is paramount.

This is no less true for healthcare organizations. The climate of the workforce in healthcare has changed significantly. Hospitals and other healthcare facilities are faced with a competitive hiring market, particularly because of the specialized nature of many of the positions. The law of supply and demand has shifted in the employees’ favour, resulting in healthcare organizations needing to showcase themselves as the employer of choice. Making the matter more complex is that this competition exists with other sectors for non-specific healthcare fields, such as information technology, human resources, accounting, and communications.

Recruitment is evolving with today’s changing employment needs. Candidates demand more, and employers that are truthful on the front end have a greater prospect of attaining greater retention of satisfied employees.

Branding, therefore, is no less significant in terms of staff recruitment. It is important that ‘customers’, or prospective employees, consider you as the only viable option for a place to begin or continue their careers.

Branding in the retail and service industries is based on offering certain promises. To maintain loyalty, those promises must be met. In terms of recruiting, organizations must also honestly present themselves about promises made and paint a realistic portrait of the organization. Promoting the wrong image results in what the Business Services Industry refers to as human loss. The employee loses out on the investment he or she put into taking the job; the colleagues who hired and trained the employee lose the time and effort they invested.

To create an honest recruitment brand, organizations must undertake an honest assessment. Highlight the

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*When it comes to being an employer of choice, everything matters.* - David Lee
organization's strengths. Develop a list of messages that are beneficial for candidates to know:

- what special benefits are offered
- what advantages would an employee gain by working for you
- what opportunities for advancement exist
- what type of professional development is offered
- is the company considered an industry leader in which the candidate will gain respect among their professional peers
- does the organization have 'family-friendly' policies
- is there a healthy work-life balance and programs in place to support it
- are there rewards or recognition for performance
- are employees encouraged to contribute and make a difference

A “culture identification process” involves polling employees at every level to identify trends and themes and to determine what they think of the organization. It helps define what is important and relevant to employees in the current climate. Trends in recruitment branding often follow trends in society.

The employer experience is at the heart of the organization’s brand. It sets the foundation for attracting, and retaining, staff. Aside from salary and benefits, it includes the company’s values and culture, opportunities, job challenges and creativity, and management style. Ira Kaufman states that the brand addresses what employees really want:

- Involvement – work that is challenging and inspires results
- Respect – talent and contributions are acknowledged
- Support – resources are provided to achieve desire outcomes
- Responsiveness – employees’ issues are responded to quickly

Kaufman goes on to note key factors in building a powerful employee brand:

1. Set the standard, the promise – the assessment of the current work environment in terms of values, culture and employee satisfaction
2. Build the brand, based on the promise
3. Showcase the brand – implement a strategy that uses a mix of media to gain traction for the brand and the jobs posted
4. Measure the impact – evaluate the impact on job seekers and employees

David Lee puts it simply. When it comes to being an employer of choice, everything matters. The ‘goods’ must be delivered. You can’t claim to be a workplace of excellence without defining how you are an excellent workplace. Everything from the first point of contact through the new hire orientation and beyond drives the relationship. Recruiting messages must match the reality of the workplace. Recruitment drives retention.

**Employee Orientation**

Retention begins on the first day of the job. According to BusinessHub, using a well planned multidimensional process for employee integration can improve retention by as much as 25%.

During the first few days on the job, a new employee will want confirmation that they made the right decision for where to begin or continue their career. First impressions, even second ones, are lasting. New employee orientation provides an important opportunity to present the organization in a positive light.

Orientation is an ongoing process that provides employees with the tools needed to be successful. Christina Morfeld, writing in “Successful Employee Orientation”, noted that these tools are education, psychological and social. Educational tools communicate consistent and accurate information, including knowledge of the organization, policies and procedures, structure. Psychological tools ease anxiety associated with being new. It includes a warm and sincere welcome, communicating expectations and expressing confidence in the employee’s ability to contribute to the team. Social tools promote the feeling of ‘fitting in’.

A comprehensive orientation program will help reduce costs by bringing employees up to speed more quickly. Successful orientation will make an impact on how quickly an employee not only becomes a contributing member of the team,
but how quickly they feel part of the team. Overview orientation provides general information such as policies and procedures, legislation, compensation and benefits, safety issues, physical surroundings. The challenge is presenting such a program that provides the necessary education and training while maintaining the attention and interest of those attending.

When developing an orientation program, consider the factors that new employees need to know about the organization. Determine which key policies and procedures employees must be aware of on the first day. Tours of the facility make the surroundings familiar. Consider calling the employee a few days before the orientation. This simple step can help reduce anxiety by providing another friendly face of the organization. Tell the employee where to park, directions to the room, what to wear, what to bring. Ask if there are any last-minute questions.

Overview orientation is often compulsory for all new hires. It does not always take into account the knowledge already gained from previous experience or previous training. Orientation can last days, and become a source of frustration for new employees who must sit through presentations on topics they already know or information they feel is not relevant to their particular position. Reviewing policies and legislation can be dry and uninteresting. Therefore, it is important to ensure that this early experience an enjoyable, memorable and learning experience.

A crown corporation in Ontario has been able to accomplish just that. Their three-day overview orientation is mandatory for all new hires. As with health sector orientation, the topics include relevant legislation, company policy, health and safety, privacy, as well as the company’s mission, vision and values. After the three days, their orientation receives consistently positive evaluations.

The Ontario Liquor and Gaming (OLG) general orientation program for staff was developed in consultation with corporate trainers, and uses a combination of presentation styles to help ensure interest in maintained.

While it is essential that those who present are knowledgeable in their area, not all are necessarily skilled at presenting. At OLG, all who facilitate orientation sessions are required to take train-the-trainer training specifically geared to the adult learner.

Before the orientation, participants are given a New Hire Binder which is theirs to keep. It contains a workbook for new employee orientation, as well an Employee Handbook, Code of Conduct, Employee Assistance Program brochure, Human Rights booklet.

The first two days are conducted by Human Resources, with guest speakers. They “tag team” the training, so participants don’t become bored hearing the same person for too long. The third day is focused on customer service training and is conducted by

Using a well planned multidimensional process for employee integration can improve retention by as much as 25%. - BusinessHub
one of the front-line supervisors. The learning objectives for OLG employee orientation are to:
• examine OLG business and values
• raise awareness of key corporate policies, benefits and programs
• explore corporate programs (operational excellence, human rights and workplace harassment, responsible gaming, and health and safety)
• identify key employee responsibilities outlines in the Regulatory Compliance Handbook

The sessions include a variety of activities, such as video, presentations, group work and games. Care is given to the order of topic and style of presentation (video, presentation, etc.) to ensure optimal interest in learning from participants. Rather than ice-breaker games, these games and activities are geared specifically toward the topic being presented. Participants can earn “GO” (stands for General Orientation) bucks for correct responses to questions in class, which encourages participation. At the end of training, participants with most GO bucks receive a prize. Games and activities keep participant interest high.

All employees receive a promotional coffee mug and pen. There is also candy throughout the training - not healthy, but participants love it. The management team is invited to join the group for lunch on one of the days, allowing for opportunity for new employees to get to know their own manager and the other managers at the site in an informal setting.

At the end of training, participants fill out an evaluation form. They are asked to evaluate the session effectiveness, the facilitators, and training facilities. Results are almost always a “strongly agree” or “excellent” from most participants on whether they gained significant new knowledge, will apply knowledge back on the job, overall effectiveness of session and facilitators.

The principles of this popular employee orientation can be applied to any sector. Following adult learning principles, ensuring the facilitators are trained in presenting, and using a combination of video, interactive activities, and presentations, will ultimately lead to a general orientation that is an enjoyable, interesting and educational.

Ultimately, orientation should result in new employees feeling valued, welcomed and integrated into the organization. It should instil pride in working for the organization. It should allow employees to quickly feel like contributing members of the team.
Respect

Intergenerational Collaboration

When focusing on employment and retention, it is clear that respect, communication, opportunities for advancement and work/life balance are all valued by employees. But not all generations are the same in their desires, some prioritize much different than others – so how do we create the ideal workplace that can facilitate the retention of all employees? How do we create an environment in which different generations can work together despite their differences?

Who are they?

Silent Generation (born 1933-1945)
This generation felt the impact following the Great Depression. Being raised in a time of economic turmoil, they have dedicated themselves to their company and are loyal team players. Many achieved success through hard work, discipline and teamwork.

Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964)
Being the most populous, Baby Boomers have ruled the workforce for years and are quite comfortable in the culture they’ve created. Boomers are typically optimistic, competitive, and focus on personal accomplishment. They carry a strong work ethic to building their careers. Many take pride in long work weeks and company dedication.

Generation X (born 1965-1976)
Living a childhood witnessing divorce and/or working mom’s has given this generation strong traits of independence, resilience, and adaptability. Many Gen X’ers entered the workforce in the early 80’s, a time of strong economic downturn. This reinforced their loyalty and many created an ability to “float” throughout numerous roles in their company.

Society has dubbed the Millennial Generation as “The Confident Generation” possibly due to being showered with attention and high expectations from parents. This cohort is described as civic-minded. Claire Raines, author of Generations at Work, believes that this generation will be our biggest asset in years to come (n.p.). Teamwork, relationships, and leadership are important to them. They will value individuals in a company more than the company itself.
Why do we need them?

According to Stats Canada, healthcare and social assistance is the country’s second largest service industry with just under 1.67 million employed. Within that, workers aged 55 and up account for 15.3% of the labour force. With Baby Boomers as the largest generation in the work force and Millennium Generation as a close second, it is vital to know what future goals/plans all staff have in order to prepare and develop the perfect work environment for everyone.

What do they want?

When looking at what each generation wants out of their employer, it’s amazing at how many are so similar. For instance, the Millennials are keen learners, wanting a diverse and challenging experience. Being technologically savvy, they can usually understand new operations faster than their co-workers. Similarly, the Silent Generation is eager to learn and build on their skills even though they may be near the end of their careers.

Every person regardless of their age wants personal satisfaction from work and facilitating collaboration between the generations requires attention to their particular strengths and weaknesses.

Gen X’ers are devoted to working independently and will gain from positive feedback and discussions on how to get the most from every position they are in. Allowing each person to talk freely about their career aspirations will provide perspective of each member’s path and how they can be assisted to achieve results.

The Silent Generation always wants to be involved, but may need to be encouraged in group participation by being asked for their opinion. Their years of knowledge and experience will prove to be an asset in starting out any plans.

Be prepared for Gen Y’s new, unheard of concepts and allow this generation to work with it. Baby Boomers typically find this difficult and may result in animosity between the groups. Try to incorporate the strengths each employee brings into a part of the project. For example, present the Baby Boomers with developing the groundwork and foundation for a project, while giving the Millennials the opportunity to utilize their technological skills in implementation of the project.

Many Baby Boomers, after a long history of hard work, will look to find a work/life balance as they see the benefits enjoyed by their younger colleagues who have lobbied for this in the workplace. Some may be already considering retirement and some may still want to continue part-time employment after retirement. Create a positive environment by having flexibility in work schedules, getting to know each employee better, and encourage work/life balance. Even Gen Y’ers will appreciate the efforts for social/family time and reward employers with positive results.
Kaye and Jordan-Evans, co-authors of Love 'Em or Lose 'Em: Getting Good People to Stay, suggest that communication is the most important tool in maintaining a healthy workplace (n.p.). Becoming a proactive communicator and listening more will help beat the rumor mill and foster communication between generations. Being visible to all members and encouraging leadership amongst all staff will benefit every one.

Each generation is a leader for another. The Silent Generation and Baby Boomers are a wealth of history and knowledge, backed with years of hard work and trial/error experience. Involving them into a mentorship with younger/newer staff will allow a solid foundation for your company’s reputation. Just be prepared for X’ers and Millenium Generation to not follow the traditional patterns that have been set years ago. They will be more focused on the task and how to achieve it specifically, rather than doing it “by the book”. It’s not that the Millennials don’t want mentors; they are devoted to only having great mentors. As young as they are, Millennials will be an asset to mentoring senior staff with all new technology and systems in your company.

Regardless of what age your team members are, their individual characteristics may defy the categories their age suggests. We can not assume that a Gen Y will act as a Gen Y, or a Baby Boomer follow what has been previously outlined. The more we create an “ageism” environment the less we are listening to our staff and appreciating what each individual brings to the team. Take the time to do a regular performance review with everyone, listen to his or her needs and coach them to succeed.

As years go by, we are faced with a difficult situation: recruitment, retention, and retirement. Many of the Silent Generation and Baby Boomers are able to retire but still have much to contribute. As the census data indicate, there will be a need in the workforce for experienced workers. Promote intergenerational collaboration by providing part-time jobs for staff wanting to continue to work or discuss phased-retirement options where their experience can help mentor new staff starting out.

Offer assistance in developing a solid career path for all. Give your team the tools that they need in becoming leaders for each other. Capitalize on the strengths of each generation to nurture intergenerational collaboration and thereby create workplaces that are great for all generations.

Works cited:
Work. Many of us spend at least 50% or more of our waking hours involved in paid work. Work and work-related activities take up an enormous amount of our time, our energy, our thoughts, and our relationships. There is no getting around it, work is a significant part of our lives. True, we need to work to provide for our families, to get things we need and want to enjoy life.

It is widely acknowledged that no one says at their death bed, “Oh, how I wish I had worked more hours or spent more time at the office.” At life’s end, people remember the relationships and the love that was given and received.

How do we marry these two seemingly incongruent realities—the need to have a job and the need to derive value from work? I believe it is by building on the relationships within the workplace, through the creation of a workplace where people feel valued, where their work holds meaning for themselves and for the community.

It may not be the work itself or the paycheque that people remember, but it will be the relationships created and nurtured while working, knowing that they made a difference in someone else’s life, that will create and enhance a sense of accomplishment. This, I believe, is what Albert Einstein was referring to in the quote above.

It may be the job description, the benefits, the wages and the physical surroundings that initially attract a quality workforce; however, it will be the value that the work brings to each individual employee and the value that they feel they contribute to the workplace that will retain these same individuals. And this holds true for all occupations across all sectors. Housekeepers, food service workers and licensed care staff all need to go home at the end of the day feeling like they have made a contribution and that their work is important to the organization.

How do we measure up in health care? Unfortunately, health care organizations have scored the lowest on several key benchmarking indicators as provided by the CPRN-Ekos Changing Employment Relationships Survey (Lowe, 50-52). These indicators include employees’ trust in their employer, employees’ commitment to their employer, employees’ assessment of workplace communications and employees’ assessment of their influence in workplace decisions. How do we turn that around? In order to do that, we must first of all define the characteristics of a quality workplace.

What are the defining characteristics of a quality workplace?

Many similarities emerge such as trust, respect, culture, leadership and good communication. It is intrinsic values such as these that are the

“The most important motive for work in life is pleasure in work, pleasure in its result, and the knowledge of the value of the result to the community.” Einstein

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**Relationships**

The job is more than a paycheque
key ingredients of a great job and contribute to the creation of a quality workplace that recruits great people and more importantly, retains great people. A quality workplace creates an environment where people flourish.

Most of the characteristics that describe a high quality workplace are inter-related and grow upon each other. However, the word “respect” rises to the top and is fundamental to all other characteristics. Mutual respect within all layers of an organization is the foundation upon which a quality workplace is created. Respect does not just happen. Respectful workplaces are created. Whether your organization is an acute care facility in a major center or a long-term care facility in rural Saskatchewan, respect must be a fundamental value.

What this all boils down to is relationship building. Levering maintains that there are essentially three relationships within the workplace – between the employee and managers, between the employee and their job, and between other employees (n.p.). These are the personal relationships that exist within a workplace which define how a person rates their job. By building on the intrinsic values outlined below (and others), the relationships are strengthened and nurtured, creating a quality workplace.

From a personal perspective, my leadership experience is within a nursing home that I believe is the best place in the world to work! Our workplace is our community. At St. Paul Lutheran Home, we have a dedicated group of leaders (including the managers) who have worked hard to create a quality workplace where people enjoy coming to work and people enjoy living. Our goal is to create a lively home for our frail elders. We firmly believe that this is only possible through the creation of a place where the people who work here feel valued. To be caring, staff needs to be cared for.

Drawing on the reading and research for this article, I have chosen to take some very real examples from my workplace, as they relate to what I feel are essential intrinsic characteristics of a quality work environment that retains its people because they want to be there, not simply because it provides one of the higher wage scales in our rural community.

St. Paul Lutheran Home is a long-term care facility that is home to 144 people. We have a staff of over 240 people and also provide services to the acute care facility attached. The majority of our staff work in unregulated occupations. Some might classify them as non-professional staff. Professionalism, however, is not defined by the job title. Professionalism is about the quality of work, the personal ethics and the attitude that the person brings to the workplace. Quality workplaces demand and foster professionalism. A quality workplace, professionalism and quality care giving go hand in hand. From the perspective of people who live at St. Paul Lutheran Home, retaining staff is essential because it allows for continuity in their care.

Trust

Trust is the underlying foundation upon which a quality workplace exists. Employees need to feel that
they can trust each other, their managers and vice versa. What is trust in the workplace? According to Levering “trust involves three elements – credibility, respect and fairness” (Levering, n.p.). Credibility is built through open and honest communication. We have all heard the expression, “walk the talk.” This is building credibility. When people see that managers and leaders follow through on what they say, credibility is established.

As leaders we also have a responsibility to convey information that affects the decision-making of others. “What they don’t know won’t hurt them” is a common expression. It is time to stop and examine that statement closely. Perhaps what they don’t know will hurt them and the time has come to be open and honest with employees and give them as much information as possible. This will encourage understanding and credibility within the organization. However, we must also be honest with employees about when a decision is out of our control or their control. To seek input when a decision has already been made will only undermine credibility.

At St. Paul, our food costs were spirally. And truth be told, part of the reason was due to staff eating food that they had not paid for. Unfortunately, as much as we might have liked, we did not have a budget to provide food for staff or for visitors on a regular basis. As difficult as it was, we were open and honest about the situation with employees. We explained the situation and advised them of our plan of action. A price list for food and an honor system to pay for the food we ate was established. This was a case where a decision had been made – to seek staff input would have diminished trust. Hopefully, through open and honest communication, trust was built.

What about trust between employees? What can we, as leaders and managers, do to establish a culture of trust within the organization? Knowing that issues will be dealt with effectively and quickly will help.

Who among us likes conflict? Health care is a people industry. Conflict happens. How conflict is handled though will help to build trust in a work place. We must deal quickly with the conflict and not sweep it under the rug or ignore it. The development of conflict management skills at all levels within the organization is essential. These are skills that can be learned and developed. However, when employees see that conflict is addressed, that they are involved in the process, trust is established.

Culture and Leadership

As we know, every organization has its own unique culture. In fact, within an organization, departments or groups can have a unique culture. Breaking that down even further, individual cultures and cliques can exist within a department or team. Within these various factions, there are formal and informal leaders. Informal leaders can have significant influence on the culture of a group of sub-group within any organization.

Again drawing on personal experience, St. Paul has many smaller cultural groups within our walls. Being a fairly large Home, we have established four smaller neighborhoods. How these neighborhoods function is largely due to the leaders within these various groups and the influence they have on the sub-culture of the neighborhood. Some of it is good; some of it is not so good. Our experience has been to draw out and build up the positive leaders within the group. This has been the driver for positive change.

Not every story is a success story. Another not so favorable example has been one of the support departments. A fairly large, vocal negative faction exists within that department. Positive change has been more of a challenge. In the past, the focus has been on trying to change the attitude of the nay-sayers. In reality, this simply has not worked. This has had a detrimental affect on the retention factor in that department. People want out. It is time to turn our attention to the positive agents of change in the group.

Communication

Undoubtedly good communication is our greatest tool and our greatest challenge. Managers are constantly challenged with coming up with innovative ways of reaching a large staff. In healthcare, the challenge has increased as administration costs have been cut and managers are expected to supervise larger numbers of people. Health regions are getting larger which
ups the ante even more. And yet, open and honest communication is a key element to a quality workplace.

It is not just the day-to-day communication between manager and employee that is important. What the organization is about and how people can feel connected to that mission is also important. According to Seitjs & Crim “People want to understand the vision that senior leadership has for the organization.” (n.p.).

At St. Paul Lutheran Home, we have a clear vision for our organization, which is to embrace and live the Eden Alternative™ philosophy of care. The Eden Alternative™ is a person-centered philosophy of long-term care which seeks to eliminate the plagues of loneliness, helpless and boredom in nursing. The Eden Alternative teaches that staff will treat elders as they themselves are treated. The Eden Alternative was founded in 1991 by Dr. William Thomas, a Harvard-education physician and board-certified geriatrician. (www.edenalt.com) As we have embarked on this journey, it has been our experience that when people understand and feel a part of this mission, they feel more connected with St. Paul and take pride in being a part of the work that we are doing. More than once staff have said, “I am so proud to be working at St. Paul.” And I believe that is because they feel the connection between the work that they do and what St. Paul is trying to accomplish.

**Empowerment**

Managers are responsible for fixing things, right? Essentially, health care is about helping others. Unfortunately, these attitudes may have contributed to a culture of dependency within the work force. People are constantly at the door not just asking for help to solve the problem, but expecting managers to “fix things.” We need to turn that around. And when you think about, it makes the most sense. These are the people who are on the “front line” so to speak. Given the opportunity, the skills and the tools to do the job, they tend to have the answers. The trick of the effective leader is to ask the right questions. We’ve all heard it – “bring me answers, not problems.” However, we need to give people the tools to provide those answers. And yes, at times it may be risky – there may be miss-steps and mistakes, but these become learning opportunities.

St. Paul has a Quality Workplace Committee, established in 2005. This committee which consists of representatives from several departments has initiated many positive events within the Home. An outcome of this Committee has been empowered employees who recognize that they do have a say in how the organization functions. In a facility this size, many opportunities arise to problem solve together. Some we are still working on. A constant cry we hear is, “we need more staff, we are so busy in the morning.” As leaders, we need to be in tune to and respond when additional staff are needed due to workload. In this instance, however, other factors may contribute to the workload, such as timing of certain tasks and coffee breaks. At times the solution may be within the control of the care staff. While we are not quite there yet, through staff meetings and discussions, the managers are working with staff to creatively solve this ongoing problem.
Recognition for work well done

Quite simply, people need to feel that their work matters. One of the simplest and quite frankly, cheapest (we are all looking for ways to save money) ways of doing this is through recognition. As leaders we need to be constantly vigilant in the lookout for opportunities to provide praise and recognition for a job well done. This goes beyond the yearly employee recognition events that tend to become very impersonal. A kind word, a card of thanks, being on the lookout for a job well done instead of looking for things to criticize, these small everyday opportunities for praise and thankfulness will go a long way in creating a workplace where people feel valued.

Leaders within all levels of an organization look for ways to recognize and acknowledge the good work of others. This cannot be done from your desk. Leaders need to get out there, talk to employees, and see what they are doing in order to find the opportunities for praise and recognition.

Recognition leads to empowerment. When people are recognized for their ideas and their contributions, they know that they matter to the organization. Work becomes meaningful. And this applies to all occupations of the organization.

Fortunately, in health care, there are many interesting and challenging occupations. However, let’s be perfectly honest, there are several essential occupations where the work is monotonous, the work that is done today is exactly the same as the work that will be done tomorrow or was done yesterday. This is especially true in long-term care facilities. Take the humble housekeeper, for example. The work that she or he does is essential to the well-being of our health care facilities and organizations. The clients’ first impression of a facility is often based on the cleanliness of the place. Housekeepers are our first line of defense in infection control. But the work is always the same.

At St. Paul we have tried to recognize the very important work that these people do in different ways. One is through control over their work. The housekeeping staff meets every morning and decides how the days’ work will be done. And we try to build on the strengths of individuals. One individual in particular has a flair for decorating. She has taken on the responsibility of decorating the front show cases, which get changed out on a regular basis. Her gifts have made an enormous contribution to the beauty of St. Paul and we try to acknowledge that on a regular basis. But perhaps the most important way these essential people feel needed is through relationship building. All full-time permanent staff work on a specific neighborhood. They have become an important part of the team, attend neighborhood meetings and most important of all, get to know the residents who live on that
neighborhood and become a part of each others’ lives.

Having fun. The therapeutic value of laughter has been fully documented. Laughter creates endorphins and we all know how healthy endorphins are and the respective benefits. Laughter energizes, creates a common bond and friendship and quite simply, it is more fun. Who among us does not feel better after a good belly laugh? Work places and leaders who encourage and create opportunities for fun and laughter will go a long way toward the creation of a quality workplace. Of course, the laughter and fun cannot displace the work that needs to get done and there are times, especially in health care where laughter and levity is entirely out of place; however, work places and fun do not need to be exclusive of each other. Laughter is an important part of every day life. So, let go. Allow yourself to look a little silly once in a while. Enjoy a good laugh with your fellow workers.

And what better way to develop personal relationships than through sharing your lives together with stories? This is one of the strengths of St. Paul Lutheran Home. People have developed strong and lasting friendships and share important events such as birthdays and family events. We hear it all the time, “St. Paul is like my family.” And they truly mean it. Of all the sights and sounds at St. Paul, of which we have plenty, laughter is the most beautiful sound of all. A picture says a thousand words – here are a group of us – elders and staff together cheering on the Saskatchewan Roughriders as they headed for the Grey Cup.

So where will all of this get us? Albert Einstein’s quote speaks about the “value of the result (of work) to the community.” Research has shown that satisfied workers translate into satisfied customers. According to Graham Lowe, “Research on health professionals increasingly emphasizes the connection between a healthier work environment, employee well-being and organizational performance… Quality work environments and quality patient care go hand in hand.” (Lowe, 54-55) There is no doubt that this is a winning combination.

Works Cited:
Retention Failure

Its true impact on your bottom line

'I regret to inform you I am resigning my position.'

Is this sentence becoming so frequently heard that it is becoming acceptable? In today’s workforce that one sentence has dollars attached.

Have you ever looked at your employees in terms of what they are saving you daily, monthly, or yearly when they are retained within your organization? This is an approach few would admit to taking but reducing employee turnover (retention failure) can save thousands of dollars. Financial expenses are the most common measure of retention failure but the soft costs can be just as great. Failing to retain a key employee can create soft costs such as an increased workload, poor moral, further resignations and poor word of mouth advertising for your organization. As the workforce continues to age and the upcoming workforce dwindles in numbers employee retention and failure to retain employees has come to the forefront in all areas of business, and more specifically healthcare.

Retaining new and near-retirement employees can be a challenge within the rules of collective bargaining agreements because of limited flexibility. What seems like a good idea to meet the unique needs of a particular employee must fit within the parameters of the respective union contract. This dilemma will need a renewed enthusiasm and perhaps a fresh view to look at how to provide enough work to new and end-career staff to fairly meet the needs of staff while reducing turnover.

Employee turnover within “non-union centres report the highest dismissal rates (7.1%) whereas unionized centres report the lowest (2.4%)” (van Jaarsveld, Frost, and Walker, n.p.). Although the turnover we see in a unionized environment is lower on average than other organizations in Canada we have to work at keeping valuable employees within their positions.

Too often, employees accept other full-time employment outside of healthcare but maintain only casual healthcare positions. This may be one of the contributors to a lower statistical turnover rate. This statistical information is at times hard to find in relation to Saskatchewan healthcare as there are few indicators and inconsistent statistical information collected on a province wide basis. This is beginning to change as the province and regions come together to ensure consistent practices and procedures from which information can be gathered.

Healthcare has felt the effects of this change with shrinking relief lists within a system bound by collective agreements.
Understanding your current employees is a starting point at which to retain them. First, the actions and values of your employees result from their age and furthermore their generational values and beliefs in the workplace.

The generational mix we are currently seeing within the workforce varies between four generations: The Matures - born prior to 1946; the Baby Boomers - born between 1946 through 1964; Generation X - born between 1965 through 1980; and Generation Y (the Millennials) - born 1981 through 1994. As this is the first time in history there have been four generations in the workforce the old ‘blanket’ approach to retention hasn’t proven to be successful.

Failing to retain an employee can easily reach costs of 150% of an employee’s annual salary (Bliss n.p.). As you continue up the ladder of positions within an organization into management or further positions the percentages continue to climb upwards of 200% - 250%. These percentages are alarming when an average unionized employee today makes $24.54 (Stats Canada) resulting in an annual salary of $47,640.31 (37.33 hours per week). Using the above percentages replacing a unionized employee with an external hire could result in a cost to the organization of almost $72,000. These direct and indirect costs result from:

- Reassignment of workload
- Overtime
- Lost productivity
- Advertising – internal/external
- Interviews – exit/new hire
- Compensation and benefits

Failing to retain an employee can easily reach costs of 150% of an employee’s annual salary.

- Administrative time – resignation/new hire
- New hire training/orientation
- Affect on moral
- Severance
- Lost knowledge, skills, contacts
- New hire education

A significant number of the above noted costs arise from the manager having to spend their time fulfilling all the processes and procedures of acquiring a new hire. In the case of a unionized employee even when the vacant position results in a hire from within the organization the direct and indirect costs can still include:

- Reassignment of workload
- Overtime
- Lost productivity
- Postings process
- Change to compensation and benefits

- Administrative time – payroll/management
- Training/orientation
- Affect on moral
- Lost knowledge, skills, contacts

If we are to continue and analyze a management position that has become vacant we will find many of the same costs re-occurring with varying levels of impact. The average income of a management position is $32.43 (Stats Canada) resulting in an annual salary of $63,238.50 (37.5 hours per week). To apply the above calculation replacement costs could be as high as $94,000.

To offer even further evidence, “an example from the health care industry, Cascio calculated that the cost of replacing 288 employees per year (in a hospital with 200 beds employing 1200 persons with a turnover rate of 2% per month) was $2,888,295.52 when all sources of costs were analyzed” (cited in Overview of Employee Turnover, n.p.).

The previous example identifies the hard costs of employee turnover but the soft costs can sometimes be the most damaging. Employees can
feel the stressful effects of increased workloads and overtime, low moral and productivity as well as employee turnover can lead to further turnover and the organizational culture can be affected.

Furthermore, when facing employee turnover the reality of the new hire is that regardless of training and education they take time to develop and fully understand their role and position. This has been estimated to take upwards of two years. This considered with the average employee turnover in Canada, “including quits, dismissals, promotions within the business, and retirements averaged 29.9 %,” means employees aren’t always staying around long enough to reach their full potential (van Jaarsveld, Frost, and Walker, n.p.)

As we move forward with fewer people in the upcoming workforce employee retention and the cost of failing to retain a valuable employee will continue to increase. Now is the opportunity to discover employee retention solutions and tailor them not only to your organization but to individual employees and their generation. Remember retaining an employee can be as simple as expressing your gratitude for them. Keeping them is always cheaper than replacing them and each day they are at work they are truly saving you money.

Works cited.
Employee retention is critical to the success of your organization. Although competitive salaries and benefits are important, other retention strategies are needed to keep employees in their jobs. Key retention strategies, which are rated as important by employees, are workplace flexibility, assistance for ongoing education, developing relationships, getting along and liking your boss, feeling appreciated and having fun at work. If you develop relationships at work, you will enjoy coming to work and you are more likely to stay in the job. Even in stressful, monotonous employment where you may not have any control over the external situation, if workers are laughing and having fun, they are more likely to enjoy their work and stay at work.

Listed are tangible ideas that could be incorporated in your workplace to make your workplace a “great” work place. These ideas are gleaned from the resources listed in the Suggested Readings section where you will find more practical strategies to implement in your workplace.

**Having fun at work**
- Staff functions and parties
- Annual trips, parties, barbecues and team building
- Games room with foosball, ping pong and chess
- Organized noon or after-work games such as roller hockey in the parking lot, beach volleyball or soccer
- Employee sports teams
- Friendly competition between departments such as pumpkin carving contests
- Seasonal contests with prizes, such as summer photo contests

**Recognition at work** (feeling appreciated)
- Press releases about staff and/or team special accomplishments
- Staff who do not use sick time during the month are entered in a monthly lottery for prizes such as gift certificates
- Celebrations at work for meeting goals, such as parties, lunches and tickets
- Regular pancake breakfasts
- Staff appreciation banquets
- Recognition programs that encourage employees to nominate each other for rewards.
- Monetary and non-monetary awards and recognition meeting company goals
- Spontaneous gift certificates or other rewards for providing excellent service
- Volunteer initiatives – extra time off for staff who volunteer
- Visible opportunities for advancement in the organization (seeing people who have been promoted from within)

**Family-friendly work environments**
- Flexible and/or reduced work hours to leave work early on Fridays during the summer
- Compressed work weeks four days/week offering three-day weekends
- Flexible work schedules allowing for part-time employment and job sharing
- Flexitime - allowing employees to accrue time or take leave to attend to personal business
- Time off without pay annually to attend to personal business (i.e. 4 months off annually)
- Phased-in retirement program
- Maternity leave top up
- Adoption assistance subsidy
- Telecommuting

**Promoting a healthy workplace**
- On-site fitness facilities with shower facilities (free or subsidized)
- Community fitness memberships (free or subsidized)
• On-site noon hour yoga and/or exercise classes
• In-house support groups like Weight-watchers at subsidized rates
• Monetary incentives to lose weight, e.g. bonuses, vacation days and/or gift cards
• Monetary incentives to get fit
• Monetary incentives to stop smoking
• Blood donor leave
• Programs that foster self-improvement, training and career advancement

Making working easier (special services on site)
• On-site day care (subsidized for staff)
• On-site elder care
• On-site massage therapist, hair salon, car washing, medical and dental facilities

• On-site auto maintenance and repairs and car detailing (e.g. the automobile service department picking up your vehicle at work and returning it at the end of the day)
• Laundry and/or dry cleaning drop-off
• Take-out meals available for purchase

Monetary incentives
• Bonuses for cost-saving suggestions
• Educational plans for staff, e.g. tuition reimbursement
• Scholarships for children of employees
• Transit subsidy to encourage staff to use public transportation
• Free parking
• Gourmet cafeterias with free and/or subsidized food.
• Free coffee, tea and snacks
• Personal computer loans

• Discounts for employees for purchased items such as mortgages, vehicles, special holidays, and clothing (employer can seek group local and national discounts)
• Discounted tickets for recreation and/or entertainment (e.g. Roughrider tickets, ski tickets)
• Extra holidays
• Cash bonuses for an employee referral program

Inviting environment
• Outdoor patio or deck
• Roof-top observation decks with gardens
• Noon-hour information sessions on parenting; saving taxes; saving money, etc.
• Annual employee opinion survey
• A room available for staff to nap

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**Relationships - The job is more than a paycheque**
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JobQuality.ca The JobQuality.ca website is a project managed by Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN), an independent, non-profit research organization with charitable status based in Ottawa, Ontario (Canada). http://www.jobquality.ca