Wellness-Centered Leadership Playbook: 4 Strategies

Strategy One: Build trust

A trusting environment is one of the most valuable characteristics of high-functioning organizations. As a leader, you must build trust with those you lead. In health care organizations, building trust across many relationships will be vital for organizational well-being and excellent patient care.

This section will help you by:

- Increasing trust between physicians and administrative leaders by building bridges between the two groups, helping them learn about each other’s roles, and identifying and developing shared core values.
- Building trust between physicians and peer (work unit) leaders by creating listening sessions between a physician leader or facilitator and a group of practicing physicians to discuss what is going well within the group and what is not working.
- Enhancing trust between health care organizations and patients with patient-directed medical communication and public health messaging.
- Developing a communications strategy and resources that promote well-being, address information needs and deliver messaging with a tone that evokes caring.

Strategy Two: Give and receive feedback

It is essential for leaders to give and receive feedback to and from those they lead. This strategy examines real-time teachable moments and ongoing weekly, monthly or quarterly dialogue that includes constructive criticism, appreciation, feedback and support.

This section will help you create a culture of wellness by:

- Physician annual reviews that develop leaders embodying five key leadership behaviors: Include, Inform, Inquire, Develop, and Recognize
- Regular, formal assessments of the leader’s behaviors, allowing physicians to give direct feedback about the leader’s impact on their team

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The Organizational Biopsy™, a framework of leadership assessment questions developed by the AMA

Leader improvement opportunities, such as executive coaching, mentorship opportunities and leader behavior workshops

Strategy Three: Prioritize clinician well-being

Physician burnout erodes the quality of care and brings significant financial costs to an organization. But beyond the business case, there are multiple compelling reasons to promote well-being in a health care organization, from regulatory requirements to the organization’s responsibility to care for its people.

This section will help you boost the well-being of physicians with strategies to:

- Understand each physician’s workload and job demands, including patient volumes, panel sizes and work that isn’t patient facing, such as Electronic Health Record (EHR) tasks.
- Whenever possible, offer physicians flexibility and control over how and when they work.
- Make every effort to provide adequate resources and implement team-based workflows to boost teamwork and efficiency.
- Create formal peer-support and peer mentoring programs to increase social support.
- Establish a chief wellness officer, a C-level executive responsible for developing strategy and guiding system-wide efforts to improve professional fulfillment.

Strategy Four: Make unit-level changes effectively

The previous strategies will build a culture of trust and wellness. Next, it’s time to make meaningful, sustainable changes within each work unit.

This section will help you bolster the culture of wellness through three key principals:

1. **Take away, don’t add.** When considering changes to improve physician well-being, instead of asking, “What else do physicians need that I can provide?” first ask, “What can we take off physicians' plates?”
2. **Engage your frontline physicians.** Use a listening campaign to solicit input from the physicians who spend most of their time seeing patients.
3. **Capitalize on easy wins.** Address the “low-hanging fruit” or “pebbles in the shoe” problems; they may seem trivial, but they often have a massive impact on those who experience them every day.

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Leaders empowered to lead with and model behaviors that build trust can improve organizational culture and promote organizational well-being. Wellness-centered leadership (PDF) is imperative for any industry but is particularly powerful in health care, where the well-being of your workforce directly impacts patient care and the wellness of an entire community.

Download the playbook