



Engaging Your Team Members

Conversation Tools

March 2017

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March 2017

To Our Members,

We know that one of the best ways to improve our workforce is to *engage* with our workforce! Communicating with intention can help you create a culture of open and honest conversation. Empowering staff who serve on the direct care team can lead to higher job satisfaction, a faster resolution to resident concerns and more support for direct care managers. But how do we engage our staff and build a culture focused on innovative solutions?

This packet provides tools and resources to use within your organization. You will find a series of questions to spark honest and instructive conversation, and guidelines on how to host these discussions in your organization.

Remember that the key lies not within asking the question, but in what you do with the answer. Engaging in candid conversation is the first step, but truly listening and following through with action are the most important parts!

LeadingAge Minnesota is passionate about engaging our workforce to achieve high-performance environments. In a time when workforce is of utmost concern, frequent and honest conversation is one answer to engaging our staff.

As you begin to use these tools, please don't hesitate to contact our workforce team if you have any questions or suggestions. This toolkit is a working document, and we look forward to adding new resources as they develop.

Thank you, and happy communicating!

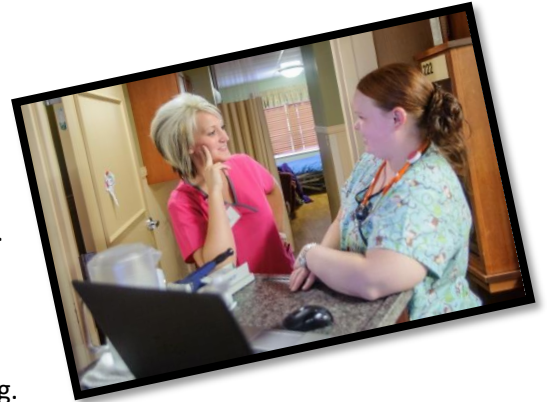
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HONEST CONVERSATION

We hear from direct care staff that they want information from leadership. They want more transparency and leaders who listen. They want to be empowered.

Are you hearing your staff?

The tools that follow will only be effective if you are truly listening. Below are some tips to help you be a more effective listener and communicator.



Verbal Communication

Keep your conversations **solution-focused**. It is easy in times of stress to find conversations turning into complaints. Empower your staff to come up with solutions to their concerns, and help them implement their ideas. You will see buy-in and teamwork when frontline staff experience those small wins! For more on this, read the Harvard Business Review article by Teresa Amabile and Steven J. Kramer, [The Power of Small Wins](#). Or, watch this short video by Teresa Amabile, titled, [The Progress Principle](#).

Acknowledge your staff. Do you offer enough praise? When you compliment your staff, you set a culture of positivity. The more staff receive praise from you, the more they will in turn praise one another. You are setting the example. Staff who praise one another instill confidence in one another. For more on this, read [In Praise of Praising Your Employees](#), by Jennifer Robinson in the Gallup Business Journal.

Repeat what you've heard back to the staff member. This will help to ensure you have accurately interpreted what the staff member is saying, and will positively build your relationship as staff know they have been understood. For more on this, and other emotional intelligence tools, read [Coaching for Emotional Intelligence](#) (pp. 28-29), or the article [Being Smart Only Takes You So Far](#), both by Bob Wall.

Use **positive words**. Word choice provides a platform to form an opinion. Choosing positive words can help to inform positive thought. Positive thoughts and feelings translate into positive nonverbal communication, which is noted below. For more on this, read [Focus on the Good Stuff](#) by Mike Robbins (pp. 117 – 122).

Nonverbal Communication

Evidence suggests that nonverbal communication is far more important than verbal communication. This means if you say one thing, but nonverbally show another, your team members may not believe what you are saying. It is important that you demonstrate honest and positive nonverbal messages in your communications. For more on this, read [Body Language for Leaders](#), by Carol Kinsey Goman.

What is included in nonverbal communication?

- Gestures
 - Do you talk with your hands?

- Are you fidgeting?
- Is your cellphone in hand?
- Facial expression
 - Do you smile?
 - Does your expression show worry or stress?
 - Are you rolling your eyes or making another inappropriate facial expression?
- Posture
 - Are you slouching?
 - Are you too close or too far from others in your meeting?
 - Are your arms crossed?
- Eye contact
 - Do you make eye contact as you pass others in the hallway?
 - Are you overly absorbed in more important things as you walk to your next meeting?
 - Are you engaging in eye contact when others speak to you?
- Voice – pitch, tone, volume, speed
 - Do you greet people when you walk past?
 - Does your voice communicate confidence and kindness?
 - Are you making others feel rushed by speaking too quickly?

Bob Wall, in his book [Coaching for Emotional Intelligence](#), suggests looking in a mirror as you speak. What does your facial expression convey when you are talking to someone? What does your facial expression convey when it is at rest? There are exercises that can be done to lift your face and help you to smile more in conversation (p. 27). And, bonus – research shows that when you smile, your body releases hormones that make you happier! Besides feeling a little silly, what’s there to lose?

Listening

Empathy is a key component to listening, according to author Bob Wall, [Coaching for Emotional Intelligence](#). Listening to a staff member requires you to pay close attention to both “*what* people say, and *how* they say it” (pp. 23-24). As the listener, you need to pay close attention to the non-verbals that your staff member is displaying during your interaction. Demonstrating empathy will build a positive foundation between you and other staff.

- **Screen out the background noise.** Make sure you can give your full attention to the speaker.
- **Keep an open mind.** Staff have lots of ideas! It is important to consider input, even if the suggestion is something your organization has tried before or something that is really *out there*. The already-tried idea may be worth reconsidering or trying in a slightly different way. The *out there* idea may work well if scaled back or tweaked.
- **Don’t interrupt, but do engage** in the conversation. Don’t take over the conversation with your own ideas, but do participate in the conversation so that the staff members know you are engaged.
- **Reschedule** if you need more time. We work in busy environments that are full of interruptions. If you cannot give your full attention, make sure the staff member knows their idea is important to you and follow up with them when distractions are lessened.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

Need help starting the conversation? Consider asking these open-ended questions to spark honest discussion with your staff. It may feel rehearsed at first, but with practice, the conversations will begin to feel organic. On the pages following this list, you will be introduced to different formats in which these conversations can take place.

The key is having a safe environment. Does the culture within your organization allow staff to feel safe during honest conversations? Do they see change based on their feedback? Do supervisors react positively and engage in conversation? You'll be amazed what you learn from staff in an open environment!

Positive Feedback

- What is the best thing about working with seniors?
- What is the best thing about working with this organization?
- What makes you proud to be working as a _____?
- What part of your job do you do best?
- What is something that makes our organization unique?
- What do you like about your work day?
- What makes this a good place to work?
- What is the best thing you saw at work in the last month?
- What have you done in the past week that makes you proud?
- Describe your best day.
- What do residents say is their favorite part about our organization?
- What has gone well today?

Team Building

- What do we do best as a team?
- What is something that makes your department unique?
- Give a shout out to a coworker who is always willing to help.
- Give a shout out to a coworker who provides great care.
- What ideas do you have to make us a more welcoming organization to new hires?
- Did you have a positive experience during orientation? Describe.
- What fun ideas do you have to recognize your coworkers for a job well done?
- Do you have any teammates you would like to give a 'shout out' to?
- What do you wish others knew about you?
- What one thing could we do to appreciate our teammates more?
- What change would strengthen your department?
- What do you wish others knew about your job?
- What do you wish the leadership team knew?

The 'Why?'

- Why did you choose to work in the field of aging?
- What keeps you here? What brings you back to work every day?
- How do you describe your job to other people?
- What would make you feel more empowered in your job?
- How do you live out the mission or values of our organization? Our mission/values include: _____
- What do you tell your friends and family about working here?

Frustrations

What is the most frustrating part of your day?
What one thing could we change to make you happier to be here?
When are we most inefficient?
What meetings should be eliminated?
What's a decision we have made in the past that you question/has made your life more challenging?
If you ran the organization, what would do differently? How would you accomplish it?
What are the barriers to doing your job well?

Suggestions

How do you think others might be doing this work better?
What tools would help you to do your job better?
How are you most efficient in serving our residents?
What is one new service we should offer, or service we should change?
What service could we most improve?
What are we doing right?
What could we be doing differently?
Which meetings foster teamwork or lead to better outcomes for residents?
What technology would make your job easier?
Is there anyone in the organization who you would like to interact with more frequently?
What should I do differently?
What are three things we can do to improve our work?
What are three things we can do to make your job more fun?
What lessons have you learned while working here?
What training do you wish you could get?
What changes would you like to see in our profession in the next five years?
What one thing could we change to provide better care?
What is fun about working here?
What could we do to make this a more fun place to work?
What do residents complain most often about, and what is one possible solution?

What if?

If a similar organization down the street had a job opening that paid slightly more than what you make here, would you leave?
What would motivate you to look for a different job?
Do you feel you have someone here you could turn to if you had a concern?

Satisfaction

Do you refer friends or family to work here? Why or why not?
Do you refer friends or family to use our services? Why or why not?
Do you have a friend at work?
Does our organization truly have an open door policy? What makes you feel this way?
Did you feel welcomed here when you were hired? On your first day?
What would make you feel appreciated here?
What could I do for you right now that would make your job better?
Do you have colleagues who care about you on a personal level?
Do you feel a sense of accomplishment at work?

CONVERSATION FORMAT: *LEARNING CIRCLES* *A TOOL FOR PROMOTING DISCUSSION & INTERACTIVE LEARNING*

Audience: Staff (departmental or interdepartmental), family members, or residents. It is ideal to have 10 – 15 participants.

Goal: To provide an opportunity for feedback or team problem solving.

Rules of a [Learning Circle](#):

1. Anyone can call a Learning Circle.
2. There is no hierarchy in a learning circle – everyone is equal.
3. Participants sit in a circle. Remove tables or other barriers if possible.
4. One person is chosen to be the convener.
5. The convener poses the question or issue. *Hint: Sometimes it may be helpful to start with an easy question to get things going, such as “What is your favorite color and why?”*
6. A volunteer in the circle responds with his or her thoughts about the topic.
7. The person sitting to the right or left of the first respondent speaks next, followed one by one around the circle until everyone has spoken on the subject **without interruption**.
8. No interruptions should be made to the person speaking. Eliminating cross-talk is difficult, but important!
9. Participants may choose to pass rather than speak.
10. After everyone in the circle has taken a turn, the convener goes back to those who passed and allows each another opportunity to respond.
11. After everyone has had a chance to speak, the floor is opened for general discussion.
12. The convener closes the circle with a summary of what has been learned, suggested, or what next steps will be.
13. Ask participants to evaluate their experience in the Learning Circle.



For more information about Learning Circles, visit the [Pioneer Network's Resource Library](#).

CONVERSATION FORMAT: *TOWN HALL FORUM*

Audience: All staff. Led by the senior leader or members of the leadership team. Content may align with other team meetings, reinforcing your organization's goals and values.

Time of Meetings: If your organization is open 24 hours, plan to host a swing of all staff meetings – meaning at least one per shift. It cannot be assumed that a staff member who works an overnight shift will attend a meeting at 2 p.m.

A Town Hall Forum may meet any number of objectives, and could include opportunities:

- To invite face-to-face interaction between the senior leader and staff at all levels.
- To address concerns or discuss suggestions from staff.
- To demonstrate your organization's mission and values – lead by example.
- To provide major organization updates that require clear and consistent communication.
- To provide updates on any external changes (regulatory, industry changes).
- To explain any changes in policies or expectations.
- To celebrate accomplishments and create a sense of team.
- To preview what staff can expect in the short term.
- To inspire, recognize, or reward team members.

Staff Suggestions: A Town Hall meeting is a great opportunity to address suggestions or questions from your staff feedback tools (satisfaction surveys, suggestion boxes). It is highly important to let staff know what you have heard from them, and to highlight how you have addressed those concerns. For example, did you change your orientation process due to feedback you received from a new staff member? Share that! Providing feedback will instill confidence that the leadership team listens to staff, and that staff are empowered to impact change. You may also wish to leave time for Q&A.

Evaluate the meeting: Were staff engaged? Did they participate when asked? Did they receive value for their time? Evaluations can be formal or informal, but should always be short. Consider asking consistent evaluation questions at each meeting to gauge results over time.

Publish Minutes or a Summary: Ensure that all staff have access to the information provided at the Town Hall Forum, even if they were unable to attend.



For more information about Town Hall Forums, see [Hardwiring Excellence](#) by Quint Studer.

CONVERSATION FORMAT: *STAY INTERVIEWS*

Stay Interviews are a great way to connect with staff. These structured conversations can help leaders touch base with new staff to ensure the onboarding process is a positive one. They can also be used with long-standing staff to find out what your organization does well. When you know what you are doing well, you can focus on building those [strengths](#).

0-30 Day Post-Hire Interviews

1. Do you understand your job? Is there anything you need clarification or more training on?
2. Is this the job you expected? Is there anything you are surprised by, or feel was miscommunicated about your role?
3. How was your training experience? Do you have any feedback for or about the trainer you worked with?
4. Are you feeling challenged by your new role? Bored? Explain.
5. Since you have fresh eyes, do you have any suggestions for improvement in your department?
6. Have you felt welcomed here by other staff?
7. Do you see a career path for yourself here? Can I help you to develop a plan?
8. Are you having any challenges I can assist you with?
9. Provide feedback on staff's strengths.
10. Provide feedback on staff's areas for improvement.

30+ Day Post-Hire Interviews

1. What is the favorite task/responsibility of your job?
2. What is your least favorite part of your job? Why is this your least favorite part?
3. What skills have you learned? How have you grown?
4. Where would you like to improve? Do you need assistance or training to do so?
5. What training has been most effective?
6. Do you have any professional goals we can help you work toward?
7. What is your impression of our organization?
8. Would you recommend friends or family to work here?
9. Would you recommend our services to family or friends?

Stay Interviews

Find your long-term staff, or the staff who are the true champions of your organization. Ask questions like:

1. What keeps you here?
2. What do you love about your job?
3. Why have you been so successful here?
4. Who has been a positive influence or mentor for you here?
5. How do you describe your profession to others?
6. What makes our organization special?
7. What could we do better?
8. What are the key messages we should use when recruiting new staff?

CONVERSATION FORMAT: *ROUNDING*

In healthcare, we often [round](#) on our residents or patients by going to each individual's room to check on their needs and answer questions. The [Association for Patient Experience](#) notes that rounding on a patient provides a chance to:

- Manage patient expectations
- Provide necessary service recovery
- Promote quality care
- Recognize exceptional caregivers
- Role model behavior

Those are all exceptional outcomes for residents. What if we had these same goals with staff? What if you were able to manage the expectations of your staff? Or provide service recovery for staff concerns? According to Quint Studer in his book [Hardwiring Excellence](#), rounding in this context is more than walking the halls and saying hello to team members. It is about engaging in direct conversation with staff, asking pointed questions and role modeling specific behaviors.

Tips:

Commit enough time depending on the size of your organization. Maybe you round less frequently, but round in your entire organization every time. Maybe you round more frequently, but only visit one section of your organization per session. The important thing is that you don't rush conversations, and that you engage in active listening.

Visit each staff person – and know them! Make sure all staff have a voice – even quieter staff have ideas to contribute in one-on-one conversations. [Research](#) tells us that having a friend at work increases loyalty (read: retention!) to your organization. When you get to know your staff on a personal level, you foster a positive social environment. So go ahead – ask about their recent vacation!

Round at the right time. This type of rounding is best suited for times that tend to be slower on the floor, otherwise staff will not be able to have an uninterrupted conversation with you. Although it is a good idea to be present on the floor during key activities or mealtimes, it may not be the best time to complete your staff rounding.

In addition to the questions listed on pages 6-7 of this packet, consider these [questions to ask](#):

- 1. What is working well today?**
Note: This is a good way to initiate positivity in your interaction.
- 2. Do you have any co-workers I should recognize today?**
Note: This is a good way to instill confidence and trust between staff members. If you hear something nice about a staff member, pass on the compliment!
- 3. What could be doing better?**
- 4. Do you have all of the tools and equipment you need to do your job?**
Note: Be sure to follow up if there is a need to repair, replace or consider new equipment.

This is an exercise that any leader, manager, supervisor or department lead can complete.

For more information about Rounding, see [Hardwiring Excellence](#) by Quint Studer.

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