



HARD AT WORK: Employee Engagement Strategies Help Retain Top Talent in Home Care and Hospice

Today, workforce challenges are a leading concern in all healthcare settings. Without enough experienced professionals to go around, organizations that cultivate top talent will thrive with a stronger, competitive edge.

Eric Scharber, Principal, Simione Healthcare Consultants, and Exact Recruiting, a Simione talent solution, said executive conversations within the last several years about workforce and staffing are taking center stage. “Workforce challenges are more central to leadership agendas and a top priority at strategic planning sessions and industry conferences. What was previously a general ‘water cooler’ chat, is now a huge issue that will remain a priority for success in healthcare,” Scharber says.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, one of every four new jobs in the US will be in healthcare, and the home health services industry will be the fastest growing segment of the US economy in terms of employment gains through the year 2024. With healthcare, and specifically home health services, becoming such a hot bed of opportunity, Scharber contends that the demand for talented staff brings greater urgency for organizations to be strategic about employee retention efforts.

A high level of employee engagement and/or satisfaction will be key to help home-based care providers stay ahead of the competition and maximize their likelihood for success. The critical factor in that success? Scharber says the direct correlation between higher employee engagement and staff retention is something that *must be measured*.

What is Employee Engagement?

According to Wikipedia, *Employee Engagement* is a fundamental concept in the effort to understand and describe, both qualitatively and quantitatively, the nature of the relationship between an organization and its employees. An “engaged employee” is defined as one who is fully absorbed by and enthusiastic about his or her work, and takes positive action to further the organization’s reputation and interests. An engaged employee has a positive attitude toward the organization and its values.



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*Principal, Simone Healthcare Consultants
Exact Recruiting, A Simone Talent Solution*

Gallup has reported that only 49% of the American workforce is engaged, and 51% of the workforce is actively searching for new employment (even if they are currently employed). Although these numbers are alarming, they represent a real opportunity for organizations to outperform industry averages and “move the needle” on employee retention. Gallup also found that engaged employees are 59% less likely to look for a job with a different organization in the next 12 months. Engagement matters!





“What Gets Measured, Gets Managed”

AseraCare Hospice, a national provider of hospice services, has a longstanding belief that employee engagement matters, and measuring it is a strategic priority. With 1,400 employees at 53 locations in 19 states, AseraCare Hospice aspires to share its passion for improving quality of life through innovative healthcare – one person, one family and one community at a time. Committed to improving the lives of patients and families within the post-acute care continuum, AseraCare fosters a culture that is dedicated to exceptional care and customer service. According to Andrew Sholly, Vice President of Human Resources, AseraCare Hospice’s work would not be possible without the support and dedication of its employees, who share their passion for the hospice mission. “Employee engagement efforts have helped AseraCare Hospice distinguish itself as a leading national provider and employer by improving communication, increasing satisfaction and reducing turnover in the workplace,” says Sholly.

Building on many years of conducting regular Employee Engagement surveys, the company moved to biannual surveys and then stepped up its game to annual surveys for the past 4 years. Sholly says, “We wanted to learn more from our staff. We wanted their

feedback to frame out what makes AseraCare Hospice a wonderful place to work.” Sholly says the hospice group could not accomplish its mission of patient care at the highest level without a fully engaged staff. “The workplace is always changing, and we realize that we don’t have all the answers,” he explains, “Annual surveys help bring clarity and direction to ensure we have a mutual commitment between organization and employee that has room to grow.”

AseraCare has built regular engagement surveys into its annual program for employee retention and satisfaction. In Fall 2017, AseraCare engaged Exact Recruiting, a Simione Talent Solution, to complete the annual survey, expanding its ability to track results and benchmark against other organizations. “We have increased employee engagement levels,” Sholly says, “and for years thought we were doing things the best way. Exact Recruiting’s expertise and process were able to validate that, while also pointing out areas where we had work to do.”

Surveys Help Improve Communication & Reduce Turnover

- ➔ Three years ago, the survey identified issues with senior leadership communication and being “connected with” staff. AseraCare’s President responded by implementing a monthly call with all employees to discuss important topics. Company leaders also took specific steps to be more visible. With these small adjustments, the company has witnessed survey results soar in these areas to well above the industry average.
- ➔ Two years ago, the survey indicated that the employee onboarding and orientation process was not performing up to standards. After a thorough review, AseraCare assigned a new Human Resources Generalist to assist specifically with new hires and revamp the entire onboarding and orientation process. The move paid off – AseraCare lost 40 fewer new employees in 2017 than it did in 2016, and the goal is to improve that number even more in 2018!



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AseraCare has adjusted its style or processes in other areas, also based on survey results. Each of these changes have resulted in higher scores in the following year’s Employee Engagement survey.

It Pays to Give Employees Reason to Stay

The biggest prize has been with AseraCare's retention numbers. Over the past 3-4 years, Aseracare agency locations scoring among the highest for employee engagement have seen a steady improvement in turnover rates. Gallup reports that on average it costs organizations 150% of an annual salary to replace a key employee. Scharber notes that by measuring and tracking Employee Engagement through regular surveys, organizations can make even small improvements in turnover rates to save tens of thousands of dollars.

Throughout his 15+ years leading recruiting, executive search and talent advisory services in home-based care, Eric Scharber contends that "employee engagement surveys are the single most valuable tool in affecting an organization's retention strategy. The information that can be discerned from these studies is crucial to decision-making going forward. Between lower turnover rates and the fact that engaged companies grow as fast as three times their competitors, the ROI for doing employee engagement surveys is obvious."



Scharber Offers Several Tips For Conducting Employee Engagement Surveys:



Work with a 3rd party expert: This will increase your participation rate by as much as 50%. When employees know their identity is truly anonymous, they are more likely to participate and be totally honest. Create a process to get genuine thoughts and real feelings about the workplace.



Perform surveys annually: Everyone is busy, but the challenges healthcare is facing related to workforce make engagement a TOP priority. Plan and budget for the survey every year.



Choose a firm that knows your industry: Simone Healthcare Consultants specializes in home care and hospice talent management and can compare your organization (confidentially) to your immediate competitors with real data, instead of benchmarking with general data that is not specific to your industry.



Share the results and act: The worst thing an organization can do is complete a survey, then never identify and address any issues that are uncovered. This will cause distrust within the organization and lessen the participation from staff the next time around.

Sholly agrees with Scharber's last point. "We share the results throughout our organization at every level. One of the main reasons our survey is so powerful is because of our President, Angie Hollis-Sells, RN, CHPN. She takes our results very seriously and expects all of our leaders to follow her example," Sholly says. "With such an elevated level of focus on retention across our organization, the survey is an essential tool for our leaders to create positive experiences for our employees."

Employee Engagement Matters. Measure your staff's engagement! Manage the results!

Simione Healthcare Consultants

Founded in 1966, Simione Healthcare Consultants embodies a diverse group of business talent across the U.S. to provide accessible, cost-effective business solutions for the home health and hospice industry. Key areas of expertise include operations, compliance and risk, finance, sales and marketing, cost reporting, and mergers and acquisitions. Simione supports performance improvement across the healthcare continuum, engaging agencies, hospitals and health networks for more effective delivery of home health and hospice care. More than 1,500 organizations use Simione's experts and tools to improve quality, reduce costs, and minimize risk to drive business performance. **Visit Simione.com.**



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