

THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE **results**

Canadian Health Care Organization Links Health with Leadership

“There’s something different here.”

This phrase is uttered by many who encounter Annapolis Valley Health (AVH) in Nova Scotia, Canada. So much so, that staff are constant panelists at conferences, sharing an award-winning program that many want to duplicate.

That difference, the “good feelings” described by new employees, patients, and others, may be attributed in part to *The Leadership Challenge* (TLC). This evidenced-based leadership development program has encouraged a culture of people who are passionate about their leadership, about the organization, and what they are able to accomplish with their team.

“We are building an organization of excellence,” said President and CEO Janet Knox. “We are sending a message that we want people to come grow with us. This is a good place, and we are committed to creating the best environment possible to work and promote health.”

In a recent survey of the recipients of their service, 84% of more than 500 individuals surveyed over a 3-week period rated AVH services a 4 or higher on a five-point scale (where five is the highest rating). “This is one demonstration of our success through our people, and we connect that back to our leadership,” said Knox.

TLC is so much a part of the corporate culture that one manager, upon leaving one of AVH’s six facilities to move with her husband to the U.S., wrote a detailed thank you note, as she was so grateful for the personal and professional growth she experienced. The letter was written in the context of *Leadership Challenge* principles.

As with many good organizations, success starts from the top. Knox was already a proponent of *The Leadership Challenge* when she joined AVH three years ago. She had

used the book in the graduate-level courses she taught, and arranged for her previous staff to take The Leadership Challenge® Workshop.

In a wonderful bit of serendipity, Knox arrived at AVH just as a “Living Leadership Team” was created, a group charged with adopting a model for a new leadership program. Literature reviews and past experience had led the district health authority to focus on three areas: people, leadership, and organizational processes and structures. The goal: build a healthy organization through leadership.

Not one to lead by edict, Knox joined the conversation, but did not force a TLC choice. Championed by Edith Menzies, AVH’s Director of Health Programs and Chief Nursing Officer, *The Leadership Challenge* was chosen and the organization began to grow from there.

“Canadian healthcare has been through a lot of changes -- good ones,” said Knox. “And those changes can create instability if you aren’t prepared to deal with them. *The Leadership Challenge’s* Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership fit with our need to create a healthy workplace through transformational leadership. TLC fits with our strategic direction, mission, vision and values. It anchors us.”

The Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) has been a part of AVH’s use of *The Leadership Challenge* program. As with most who take it, the feedback has been extremely valuable. In fact, even though it wasn’t required, many executives took their results to Knox, wanting to share and continue the dialogue about their own leadership development.

“From the executive perspective, there is an expectation that we’ve made the commitment to The Five Practices,” said Knox. “We’re now promoting these practices and watching them become integrated throughout our organization. It’s making a difference.”

AVH is using *The Leadership Challenge* to create common language for the executive team and leadership forum and have placed The Five Practices as a footer to its mission on district documents included in presentations. TLC is also used to focus AVH’s approach to issues, solutions, and how employees act inside and outside of the organization. “TLC helps us focus on our individual and collective responsibilities to support each other’s success,” said Knox. “This leadership model has raised awareness in our leaders. They are very knowledgeable about how we expect them to lead our people.”

In addition to the LPI and on and off-site TLC course, the crux of AVH’s leadership program is the development of “Leadership Champions” amidst the 65-member

leadership forum. A call went out asking for volunteers who wanted additional *Leadership Challenge* development in return for promising to “Model the Way.”

Initially, 15 jumped at the chance to share *The Leadership Challenge* tenants – both by example and through dialogue. “The program really fosters that person-to-person connection,” said Sheila Rankin, AVH’s Director of Human Resources. “Our literature reviews reminded us that people need to feel valued, and often that value comes from their front line manager.”

The inaugural group of Leadership Champions came from across the management structure – executives and directors as well as front line managers. “Our Leadership Champions are so passionate about leadership. They see the extra training they’ve received as a gift from the organization,” said Rankin. “They believe, as we do, that good leadership makes a difference in the way we can deliver health services.”

Once the leadership forum is full of Leadership Champions, AVH plans to invite others to take on the role, starting with those who lead nurse councils, safety committees, and other groups. “We know that leadership is also about informal leaders, and we want to grow those people as well,” said Rankin. “We want to have enough folks doing this that it becomes the natural way. We want enough folks to live and breathe these principles so that they’re integrated into our culture.

“It’s a constant journey, through constant education, and we’ve got a lot more work to do. But we’ve got a solid foundation. And it really is ‘different’ here, thanks to *The Leadership Challenge*.”

Others are noticing as well. Recently Rankin was selected as the 2007 recipient of the Bluenose Chapter of the Canadian College of Health Service Executive’s CEO Award for Leadership and Innovation in Healthcare. “This award acknowledges Sheila’s contribution to leadership development and organizational health at the district and provincial levels,” said Knox.