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Guide to Effective
Staff Development in
Health Care Organizations

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Patrice L. Spath, Editor

Foreword by James B. Conway

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Guide to Effective Staff Development in Health Care Organizations

A Systems Approach to
Successful Training



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Foreword



James B. Conway

If you are a busy health care executive, congratulations on picking up this book. At a time when the workday couldn't be longer and the work demands more complex, it is in your best interest to read it all the way through. The need for training in our health care institutions is expanding exponentially, yet the dollars to support such training are not. It is crucial that as executives responsible for the best use of funds, we get maximum value from our training dollars, recognize and understand the enormous potential from training and the cost savings that can result from it, and focus our efforts for maximum effectiveness. Without question, training can contribute significantly to organizational and personal success. But that doesn't just happen. Creating and sustaining a learning culture and the accompanying training activities requires organizational leadership.

This book is written for health care executives as a guide toward action-oriented results. In planning its content, some key assumptions were made about executives and their needs. The authors have assumed that a vibrant learning environment is essential for organizational success. They strongly believe that executive leadership is essential to the learning organization and that learning and training are challenging, if not impossible, without it. They also understand that no matter how talented a leader may be, leading a

learning organization is not an innate skill. For leaders to be effective in that role, they must learn how to do it and where to focus. Leaders themselves must be good students and good teachers.

We need to know where the future of health care is heading, and a vision of a dynamic learning environment will help keep us on course. The key components of my personal vision are as follows:

- Organizational leaders participate fully in training as students, teachers, and supporters.
- Everyone recognizes that training is essential, not discretionary.
- Leaders understand the need to provide up-to-date resources for training in the form of staff, space, time, and employee benefits.
- Teaching and training are competencies to be developed and rewarded in staff at every level in the organization.
- Staff receive the training they need to be successful in the organization, using its systems and initiatives. This training begins before program implementation and continues into the future.
- Training programs are fashioned to meet prioritized institutional, programmatic, and departmental goals and with the active participation of leaders and staff.
- Training outcomes are measurable, are measured, and are reviewed.
- Technology is used effectively to support learning and reassessment.
- Staff have the opportunity to seek out training opportunities in-house or externally to support continuing education as well as to maintain current competency.

- Everyone should be encouraged to take day-to-day experiences and translate them into organizational improvement solutions.
- Training programs should be expanding, not shrinking.

What are the outcomes if this vision is realized? Three are of enormous importance:

1. *High-quality patient care and continuous improvement.* Effective competency assessment, training intervention, and in-service and continuing education allow for the provision of care that is more standardized, reproducible, and measurable. Instead of hoping, wishing, or “ordering” staff to do things right, the focus is on enabling through dynamic training. In this environment, when staff experience difficulties or failures in day-to-day operations, they use the learning potential of these events as a resource for improvement. In my vision, it is impossible to have breakthrough performance improvement in the absence of a learning environment.

2. *Successful change management.* Our organizations are all going through massive change. If we are committed to making improvements, such as those suggested in studies like *Crossing the Quality Chasm* (Committee on Quality of Health Care in America, 2001), even more massive changes will be needed. These changes will require significant resources. Organizations that place a high priority on learning will find change dramatically more successful because the efforts will have positioned staff for success.

3. *Improved retention and recruitment.* People come to health care to be successful, to be part of the solution, to make a difference, and the vast majority want to continue on that path. They want to learn, grow, do things right for the people they serve, and remain well prepared for the work of each day as well as for the next move, the next success. Employees—we executives, too—are attracted to organizations that position us for success and are alienated by organizations that position us for failure. Staffing shortages now and in the foreseeable future will make recruitment and retention key areas

of focus. Fostering an effective learning environment is a big plus in being perceived as an employer of choice.

Reference

Committee on Quality of Health Care in America, Institute of Medicine.
Crossing the Quality Chasm: A New Health System for the 21st Century.
Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 2001.

Preface



Peter Drucker (1993, p. 193) writes that the “basic economic resource . . . is no longer capital, nor natural resources . . . nor labor. It is and will be knowledge.” Staff education and training is an important and valuable asset in a health care organization. Workforce development activities enhance employees’ skills and help achieve health service goals. Education and training is also a critical component of a successful staff hiring and retention strategy. Training can also benefit employees by improving their incomes, advancing their careers, and enabling them to grow as people.

To survive in the increasingly competitive markets, health care organizations need employees with highly developed skills. Today’s job descriptions for health care workers call for multiskilled people who can adapt quickly to new technology and learn new ways of performing tasks. Every health care organization faces the challenge of hiring and retaining people who meet these job requirements. As work in health care becomes more complicated and as hierarchical structures give way to lateral organizations, all employees will need retraining and retooling. To ensure quality and consistency, many organizations will need to strengthen internal staff training and development programs. A health care organization cannot maximize resources without focusing on its most important asset: employees.

There appears to be a growing realization among health care organizations that staff education and training programs must be improved. Having struggled through downsizing and budget cuts

over the past several years, senior leaders are now seeing the unfortunate results of not having given the staff training function adequate priority during these turbulent times. Human resource and staff education departments have been among the hardest hit by job cuts in health care facilities.

Correcting past mistakes is made more difficult and yet more important by today's demographic and employment market trends. The health care workforce is aging rapidly, and in the next five years, many of its members will be eligible for retirement. Exacerbating the problem is the tight labor market, which makes attracting new employees—especially those in direct patient care positions—hard to do. All these signs point to an emerging crisis in the health care workforce. There is a solution, however, and senior leaders in health care organization must be part of that solution. Aggressive recruiting and quality training will succeed only when leadership is committed to a learning environment. Part One of this book covers the elements of a learning organization and the role of leaders in creating and supporting such a climate. In Chapter One, Anthony DiBella describes the context for learning in health care organizations and suggests how educational priorities can be established. A model for integrating all facets of staff education and performance evaluation is presented by Kathleen Heery in Chapter Two. In Chapter Three, Diane Boynton and Donald Sibery discuss the poignant transformation of Central DuPage Health, in Winfield, Illinois, into a learning environment.

There are numerous books on the technical aspects of staff development in health care organizations. This one is different. It is designed to provide the health care executive with an overview of staff training and education strategies to help leaders make informed decisions about program priorities. To begin this instructive process, Part Two of the book is devoted to training issues. In Chapter Four, Connie Kuykendall and Sally Zuel summarize the significant training issues health care organizations face. Chapters Five

through Eight present key challenges in greater detail, along with solutions: selection of training methods, adult learning strategies, measuring the value of training, and critical components of an effective training program.

Throughout the country, a number of health care organizations have already begun to tackle the dilemmas of staff education and training. In Part Three, four case studies are presented to illustrate some effective training initiatives in health care organizations. Each case study is prefaced with short statements that describe the presenting problems, solutions, and results from each organization. In Chapter Nine, Christina Dempsey details the nurse scrub training program at St. John's Regional Health Center in Springfield, Missouri. The Web-based coding training program at Catholic Healthcare West is described by Gloryanne Bryant and Claire Dixon-Lee in Chapter Ten. The comprehensive staff education and training program at William Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak, Michigan, is presented by Alice Speers, Karen Zaglaniczny, and Christine Zambricki in Chapter Eleven. In Chapter Twelve, Rebecca Petersen details a unique training collaboration among hospitals in Northern California.

Health care organizations can't hope to achieve their strategic mission goals without paying attention to the people factor. There are no results without talented people to put them in place. To transform an organization into a learning environment and set the stage for an effective staff education program, senior leaders must establish a learning vision and objectives and position staff educators to be strategic partners in the process. The organization must study the gaps between employee knowledge and skills and current and future needs. A plan of action must be designed to close those gaps with recruitment, education, succession planning, restructuring, or other means. Training programs must be aligned with strategic business goals and constantly reassessed on the basis of successes, failures, and changing organizational needs.

While staff educators can assess people's learning needs and develop training programs, there are no guaranteed results without leadership support. For staff development to be effective, senior leaders must have the will to follow through with resources and personal involvement. Staff education and training initiatives must be part of each health care organization's broader strategic planning effort.

Reference

Drucker, P. *Post-Capitalist Society*. New York: HarperCollins, 1993.

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The Editor



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*To Karen Fine,
my amazing and loving daughter and friend*