

To be an employer of choice

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Recently, Colin Powell said: "Organizations don't really accomplish anything. Plans don't accomplish anything either. Theories of management don't much matter. Endeavours succeed or fail because of the people involved. Only by attracting the best people will you accomplish great deeds" (1996). How to be an employer of choice for the brightest graduates and the best, expert, specialty nurses is the challenge for nurse leaders of the new millennium. The nursing shortage has arrived. With it comes a multitude of factors that have stretched the health care system and challenged all health care employees. It may read as hopeless, but do not despair! The environment for nursing staff has become competitive. This is not a bad thing. It simply requires that leaders of organizations, divisions and services ensure that their environment is a great place to work. This article may help you to rethink your strategies in order to become an employer of choice.

The nursing shortage is real. We face the 'retirement wave' as the percentage of RNs under 30 years of age shrinks at a constant rate from 25% of the nursing population in 1980 to 9% in 1996, and the average age of RNs increases from 40.3 in 1980 to 44.3 in 1996. Concurrently, there is declining enrollment in nursing schools as more people choose professions with increased wages and better working conditions. Specialty nurses are becoming an elusive breed where it can take as long as 90 days to fill vacancies in areas such as emergency, oncology, intensive care and

the operating room (The Nursing Retention Series, 2000). Juxtaposed against this is an overabundance of RN dissatisfaction where more nurses are dissatisfied with their chosen profession. Ultimately, this leads to a heavier reliance on new graduates, increased stress on senior staff, nursing turnover, burn-out and huge financial costs to the organization. The downstream consequence of all of this is what I call the "job dissatisfaction continuum". This continuum includes ineffective recruitment strategies, hiring and interviewing dysfunction, preceptorship dysfunction and staff demoralization leading to defection and burn-out. To some extent, I believe that the job dissatisfaction continuum is a byproduct of incongruency, chaos, limited vision, inflexibility, rigidity, negativity, traditional thinking, and a non-competitive edge mentality within all levels of an organization.

In order to gauge your performance and that of your organization, I have provided you with the job dissatisfaction continuum checklist. I have separated the checklist into three areas: the organization, the division and the services (See Table One). Read over this checklist and take some time to reflect on what aspects of your organization, division and services may be impeding the way to you being an employer of choice.

An employer of choice means ensuring that your department is an attractive place to work. Is this possible with the stretched health care system? Yes it is possible. The recipe is simple: teamwork, positive thinking, creativity, innovation, risk-taking, collaboration, persistence and caring. Does it sound

esoteric? Maybe. Still, there are numerous strategies that can be utilized to ensure that your department is flourishing in a health care system faced with a multitude of constraints.

To be an employer of choice, you must have a positive synergy at the levels of the organization, the division and the services. Your message must be congruent to any prospective employee at all levels. To become an employer of choice, the department of human resources, the department of academic practice and professional development and the department of nurse managers must work together in order to create an environment that fosters opportunity for employees.

The human resources department is the first organ that is linked to what I call the job satisfaction continuum. I view this group as the organizational ambassadors. They must have a vision of recruitment and retention. They must track nursing manpower statistics. They must advertise, conduct focus groups and hire a promotional agency. They must be

Did you know...

- The number of NENA members is 1,370!
- The **Globe and Mail** published an article in December about the joint position statement put out by NENA and CAEP on "Overcrowding in the ER".
- The **Ottawa Sun** published an article on the NENA national conference, "The Circle of Violence", in May.
- A NENA fact sheet has been developed and will be included with all new members' packages.
- Two new position statements are being developed: *Role of the Non-RN Health Care Provider in the ED* and *Family Presence in Resuscitation*.

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publicly visible at every opportunity to promote the organization. They must network and market at the regional, provincial, national and international levels. They must communicate their strategies to the division and the services.

The second vital organ that comprises the job satisfaction continuum is the academic practice and professional development department. I view this group as the innovative risk-takers. This is the group that brings the players together. In our organization, they are comprised of clinical nurse specialists, nurse clinician educators and nurse researchers. This department is faced with the challenge of ensuring that the professional learning needs of the organization are fulfilled while ensuring that the professional support systems are in place to sustain quality patient care. In order to do this, they must establish a strong partnership with nursing colleges and universities. They must offer a variety of nursing grand rounds, in-services, and tutorials. They must be creative and visionary in developing and maintaining orientations of new nurses while supporting and advancing opportunities for expert, specialty nurses.

The final organ that contributes to the job satisfaction continuum is the chief recruitment and retention officer. He/she is ultimately the key to being a successful employer of choice. Who is this person? This is the frontline manager. Immediately, I perceive that the hair on your neck is standing on end. I can hear some of my colleagues saying "What!!!! She isn't suggesting that I wear another hat". Not only am I suggesting that we wear another hat, I believe that at the present time, this is the most important hat that we wear. Through communication, caring, clarity, creativity and the competitive edge, you can be an employer of choice. Do not think about what you cannot do. Think about how you will do it! Communicate within and outside your institution on a constant basis. Bring the community into your department. Communicate consistently with human resources and the academic practice and professional development department. Care for your team. Actions speak louder than words. Reflect on the positive reinforcement that you give, the words of

Table One: Job dissatisfaction continuum checklist

- Gauging your performance

Organization

- Limited vision re short-term, mid-term and long-term recruitment and retention strategies.
- Dependency upon the human resources department for recruitment.
- Non-existent and/or unattractive recruitment package from human resources.
- Limited link with colleges and universities.
- Limited public visibility and promotion of organization.
- Limited communication with division and services related to needs.
- Values and mission statement non-existent, vague, and/or not practised.
- Limited risk-taking re new projects and programs.
- Limited recruitment and retention performance tracking.
- Tracking of employee satisfaction limited.
- Bureaucratic difficulties for new hires (parking, daycare, ID cards).
- Organizational constriction.

Division

- Limited and/or non-existent academic practice and professional development department (CNS, clinician educator, nurse researcher).
- Limited vision re short-term, mid-term and long-term recruitment and retention strategies.
- Limited support for development of patient quality care and professional learning needs.
- Limited link with colleges and universities.
- Limited access to funding for recruitment and retention.
- Limited risk-taking re new projects and programs.
- Tracking of employee satisfaction limited.
- Division constriction.

Services

- Limited managerial orientation, coaching and support.
- The manager of the department has not received recruitment and retention preparation.
- Limited understanding and link with human resources, academic practice department and other services.
- Limited vision re short-term, mid-term and long-term recruitment and retention strategies.
- Reliance upon human resources for recruitment.
- Non-existent and/or unattractive service recruitment package.
- Vision created unilaterally and not communicated or designed with staff involvement.
- The design for new hires reflects tradition: interview/hire/orientation/work.
- Limited staff-team involvement (MDs, orderlies, nurses, clerks, housekeeping, volunteers).
- Skills lacking in hiring and interview techniques.
- Limited marketing ability of the manager and the team.
- No tour of department, no introduction of team and no positive responses from team.
- No exit interviews and follow-up of why candidate chose to go elsewhere.
- No preceptorship training and package.
- No orientation package.
- No framework for the entry point of practice of each new hire.
- Limited support and follow-up of new hires.
- Limited mentorship programs.
- Limited participation in committees for staff involvement (no time – no personnel available).
- Limited promotion of conferences, courses, in-services, and bursaries.
- Limited extracurricular activity outside of unit.
- Limited student support, value and appreciation.
- No research projects.
- Limited employee growth opportunities.
- Limited employee recognition.
- Limited stress reduction programs.
- No regular performance appraisals.
- Limited flexibility in scheduling.
- Limited communication, care, clarity, creativity, competitive edge.
- Service constriction.

Table Two: Job satisfaction continuum checklist - Guiding your efforts

Recruitment

- Vision designed with team.
- Organization, division and services congruent, collaborative and committed.
- Recruit local, national, international.
- Create a website.
- Advertise.
- Open house.
- Regular ED recruiting letters posted and sent to all colleges and universities.
- Staff go to their respective graduate colleges and universities.
- Power Point presentation of ED.
- Organization and services recruitment package.
- Hand-out to every nurse, student and prospective candidate.
- Attractive package: pictures; letter describing the ED; orientation process (flexibility); theory courses; committees; education opportunities; business cards
- Telephone, network and welcome college instructors and professors.
- Support and involve nursing students in your department.
- Involve department in college and university activities.
- Hire nursing students for summer as orderlies and unit coordinators.
- Hire nursing students to provide TLC.
- Hire graduate level students for summer research projects.
- Follow up prospective candidates immediately and consistently when they show the slightest interest.
- Interview authentically but sell your department.
- Tour the department – show it off, let the team show it off.
- In our organization and in our department you will have the opportunity for.....
- Exit interviews.
- Communication, care, clarity, creativity, competitive edge

Development

- Secure loyalty
- Excellent orientation program: preceptorship module; preceptorship training; orientation designed according to entry point of practice for each nurse; fluid; consistency; care.
- Senior and junior pressures: education, communication, and meetings.
- Communication, care, clarity, creativity, competitive edge.

Retention

- Customized and flexible scheduling, weekends, LOAs.
- High quality of work life – functional and ample equipment.
- High patient satisfaction.
- Pride: uniforms, ID cards, logos, trauma glasses for Valentines Day.
- Constant communication – meetings, book, board, social outings, visibility of manager.
- Committees: pain, trauma, marketing, GPL, nursing students, preceptorship, leadership, violence, practice quality committee.
- Nurses in charge – develop leadership.
- Reward and promote risk-taking (e.g. SSU/GPL's).
- Employee of the month.
- Employee cards and flowers representative.
- Pizza rounds.
- Q3 weekly in-services and guest speakers.
- Employee performance appraisals.
- Bringing certifications and baccalaureate education to organization.
- Promotion and facilitation of funding for attending and presenting at conferences.
- Promotion and facilitation of funding for certifications (bursaries, marketing committee).
- Promotion and facilitation of baccalaureate education.
- Team spirit (volunteers).
- Public visibility of department employees: media writing, guest speaker at schools and organizations.
- Tracking costs and communicating same.
- Support a contagious attitude.
- Manager development: education, courses, in-services, clinical activity.
- Communication, care, clarity, creativity, competitive edge.

inspiration that you bestow. Establish clear expectations and clarity. Clarity is about being authentic and real. It is about transparency and openness. Have an open door policy, an open office, open to being paged, and open about sharing yourself and your life. In addition, be open to negativity. Remember, the tyranny of negativity suggests that negative is bad. However, negatives can lead to debate and produce creative ideas. Creativity is about risk-taking. It is about seeking opinions of staff, taking suggestions and unconventional proposals and trying them out. The status quo just doesn't work very often anymore. Finally, one of the most important and least taught and/or appreciated traits in nursing education is how to market your department as an employer of choice. I give a long list to prospective candidates as to why they should work in our organization. Being in a competitive environment means that you have to sell your area.

The nurses of today are a dynamic, bright, empowered group of men and women who desire professional growth, autonomy and stimulation. Traditional leadership can clash with this premise. Inclusion of staff will strengthen the team, enhance retention and, via word of mouth, facilitate recruitment. This will ultimately lead to the job satisfaction continuum and help you in becoming an employer of choice (see Table Two). Good luck and keep your spirits soaring. ☘

Acknowledgements

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