Building the Right Workplace Culture with every New Recruit

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Staff burnout and attrition are major challenges in the healthcare industry and tackling them from the outset is critical to attracting and retaining key workers.
Claire Aldred of RLDatix shares 3 suggestions to help improve long-term results

In our last article 'Managing change in Healthcare through Servant Leadership', we explored how the traditional top-down leadership style is outdated, and more importantly, ineffectual. We concluded that the best leaders focus on helping people feel purposeful, motivated, and energised so they can bring their best selves to work and are empowered to deliver outstanding patient care.

Of course, caring for your staff is based on the ethical and professional values of good healthcare but research suggests it is also a key differentiator of successful organisations in all industries. On the other hand, leaders who fail in their duties of care are often repaid with higher levels of attrition and staff burnout, perennial issues in the healthcare sector that are worsening with the extremely high stress levels caused by the on-going COVID-19 pandemic.

In a recently published survey by Nursing Times, 44% of nurses that responded described their mental health and wellbeing as "bad" or "very bad" – a 10% rise on the 2020 survey. In addition, 62% felt their mental health had deteriorated since the early spike in cases last spring. In total, 84% rated themselves as feeling more stressed or anxious than before the pandemic began. When asked about the current level of mental health and wellbeing support 62% said the support provided nationally was inadequate – up from 54% in 2020.(i)

Meanwhile, throughout the NHS, Trust leaders are particularly concerned about the resilience and wellbeing of their staff as the pandemic unfolds. After the first wave 99% were either extremely or moderately concerned about the current level of burnout across the workforce.(ii) Even more worrying is that COVID-19 has made one in four healthcare workers (almost one in three nurses and midwives) more likely to leave their role after the pandemic. In the National Health Service this would be the equivalent of losing 350,000 vital workers. It's a trend which the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), the UK's pre-eminent progressive think tank warns could impact healthcare capacity for years to come.(iii)

Positive Workplace Culture Starts with Positive Beginnings
While it is impossible for healthcare leaders to reverse these nationwide trends overnight, they do have the power to transform culture from within and so influence healthy staff outcomes across their own organisation. Successful leaders recognise that demonstrating care and compassion throughout the employee lifecycle, starting with recruitment, is essential to supporting and retaining NHS staff and building a positive workplace culture. A key element for wellbeing is to feel valued and appreciated. Building a culture where communication is thoughtful and effective ensures that people know what is expected of them, that they are empowered to carry out their duties and they receive constructive feedback on their work.

In the Gallup Q12 (iv)Employee Engagement questionnaire, the first two questions are:

•Do you know what is expected of you at work?
•Do you have the materials and equipment to do your work right?

In the paper; Through The eyes of The Workforce - Creating Joy, Meaning, and safer health care from the Lucian Leape Institute, this idea is taken a step further when it states that there are three questions to which people should be able to answer Yes every day.

They are:
• Am I treated with dignity and respect by everyone?
• Do I have what I need so I can make a contribution that gives meaning to my life?
• Am I recognised and thanked for what I do?

Being able to say “Yes” to all three of these questions, gives people a sense of purpose and self-belief at work which goes way beyond simply earning a living. Investing executive attention in ensuring that new staff have access to experienced staff they can approach with questions will reap dividends. It boosts confidence, empowers staff to care for patients in their own way and builds long-term staff loyalty.

Building the Right Culture with Every New Recruit
The key to an effective recruitment strategy is if you retain the people you have, you don’t have to recruit, saving significant amounts of time and money that can be re-deployed to support better patient care. Here are three suggestions to help get on the right track from the very beginning:

1.Agree and define your ideal culture from the outset – successful organisations know what their ideal workplace culture looks like before the recruitment process even begins. More importantly, they learn from the past to define the future. How many people join the NHS with high hopes only to have them dashed by the systemic failings of a healthcare culture that centres around fear and blame? If your staff continually ask themselves “What will happen to me if something goes wrong?” now is the time to act quickly.

First, eradicate the fear that discourages staff involvement and paralyses productivity. After all, most people who have suffered grief and bereavement following the death of a loved one are actually more concerned with what you are doing to prevent this happening again to somebody else rather than punitive measures.

Introduce a just culture that supports fairness, openness and learning by making staff feel confident to speak up when things go wrong, rather than fearing blame. Find ways to create a workplace environment where staff are encouraged to be open about their own mistakes as well as the potential failings of other individuals or the organisation as a whole. This allows valuable lessons to be learnt so the same errors can be prevented from being repeated.

At the same time, change the leadership style and be a servant leader, one that focuses on building systems and processes that enable people to flourish in their roles and to be the very best that they can be.

2. Interview smart – develop an interview process that promotes your culture. Look beyond the usual pool of direct line managers. Instead, identify those individuals who express pride in working for your organisation, generate pride in themselves and in others and have the ability to enthuse and exhibit your ideal culture. Build and cultivate this network of culture champions and involve them in the critical first steps of the recruitment process.

Don't forget to re-assess – and amend if necessary - your corporate interview process. It should reflect your open, transparent culture that provides a platform for potential candidates to shine. Interview smart and you'll be rewarded with the best, motivated talent in the healthcare industry.

3. Cultivate the art of mentorship – going back to the IPPR's alarming statistics that the NHS could lose up to 350,000 valuable staff after the pandemic and the outlook is frightening on so many levels. Assuming that a large proportion of these people have years of experience behind them, then organisations risk losing an incredible bank of knowledge and expertise that has built up over decades. What is more, they lose a collective organisational memory of what works and what doesn't, valuable learning that would be shared with new recruits. The lesson is: nurture experienced talent to build a highly effective pool of mentors that are critical to the success of your onboarding activities. Mentorship empowers and influences not only the new employee, but the mentor themselves.

Attracting and keeping staff starts with building the right workplace culture and with every new recruit. For more information, ideas and inspiration, visit RLDatix (http://www.rldatix.com)

RLDatix is building a global partnership network focused on supporting organisational changes focused on Care for the Caregiver and open and transparent communication with both patients and staff. If you would be interested in working with us on this please contact Polly Kirk, Marketing Manager, UK & Europe, pkirk@rldatix.com
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Claire Aldred is Managing Director, UK & Europe of RLDatix

About Claire Aldred
Claire is the Managing Director for the United Kingdom and Europe (UKE). She brings over 10+ years of building strong and long-lasting relationships with customers and internal teams – placing a focus on ensuring their experience with RLDatix is always a positive one.

About RLDatix
RLDatix is on a mission to change healthcare. We help organisations drive safer, more efficient care by providing governance, risk and compliance tools that drive overall improvement and safety. Our suite of cloud-based software helps organisations reduce healthcare-acquired infections, report on adverse events, and ensure patient safety learnings are deployed effectively and immediately through dynamic policy and procedure management. With over 3,000 customers in 19 countries, RLDatix software protects hundreds of millions of patients around the world.

For more information, visit RLDatix (http://www.rldatix.com)

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(i) Nursing Times
(https://www.nursingtimes.net/news/mental-health/nursing-times-survey-reveals-state-of-nurses-mental-health-one-year-into-p

(ii) CDN Survey
(https://cdn.ps.emap.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/10/State-of-the-NHS-provider-sector-October-2020.pdf)

(iii) IPPR
(https://www.ippr.org/news-and-media/press-releases/covid-19-one-in-five-healthcare-workers-could-quit-after-pandemic-unle

(iv)Gallup Questionnaire
(https://www.gallup.com/workplace/284180/factors-driving-record-high-employee-engagement.aspx)

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