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Resources for Nursing Home Professionals

Leadership Skills

Nursing homes are complex organizations. Therefore, managers must wear many hats. They must deal with personnel issues, manage the budget, and effectively address clinical issues. An effective leader motivates, inspires, and leads by example to help employees do their jobs as best as they can. This Fast Fact focuses on which leadership skills are important for managers in nursing homes.

Setting Direction and Leadership

- **Develop a Mission Statement.** Recruit an interdisciplinary team and work together to create a mission statement for your organization. Next, establish organization-wide goals and values designed to achieve the mission, using the goals and values to guide plans, decisions, and actions. Remind employees about the mission on a regular basis by telling stories about employees who are providing outstanding care and service. Re-examine the mission each year and ask for staff input on making revisions as your organization grows.
- **Create a Culture of Empowerment.** Encourage employees to be active participants in the organization's decision-making process by asking frequently about their opinions regarding equipment, supplies, and quality improvement system changes. For example, if purchasing a patient lift, ask a team of CNAs to choose which patient lift to purchase.
- **DONs and Administrators Must Work Together.** Directors of Nursing and administrators must communicate on a daily basis. Model for the staff how professionals communicate and work together.

Key Leadership Actions

- **Conduct Frequent Rounds.** Walk through the entire building at least twice per day. Greet staff, residents, and their family members by name. Model excellent customer service for the staff. Visit the dining room during resident meals and pour coffee. Catch employees in the act of excellent care and compassionate service and praise them. Keep your door open as much as possible.
- **Stay Engaged with Residents.** Be involved with residents by leading resident council meetings, visiting new admissions within 48 hours, and sitting with residents in their

rooms. Ask questions about the care and service they are receiving. Invite them to share their life stories with you by asking who people are in their family photos, where they were married, and what they did for a living.

- **Never Stop Learning.** Attend leadership and management seminars outside of health care (i.e., Fred Pryor, CareerTrack). Purchase leadership books on CDs and listen to them on your commute. Constantly reflect on your effectiveness as a leader and strive to make improvements. Organizations improve when leaders improve their leadership skills.
- **Seek and Accept Constructive Feedback.** Managers often have a difficult time seeing their own flaws or how they really are perceived. Ask for constructive feedback from various employees, residents, families, or peers by having them fill out a short anonymous survey about you. Do not be defensive—accept the feedback, ask for specific examples, and take time to analyze what people say. Ultimately, this will help you become a better leader.
- **Be Consistent.** Be consistent in your mood, word, and day-to-day practices and you will be trusted and respected by employees and residents. Commit to be positive and consistently express your expectation that the organization will exceed your high standards.
- **Network with Other Leaders.** Seek out professional networking opportunities; use groups or associations like the National Association of Directors of Nursing Administration in Long Term Care (NADONA/LTC) of the American Health Care Association. They have state chapters, online resources, and local meetings as well as national conferences. California nursing home trade associations are also great resources for education and networking.

Leadership Skills

Help Staff Work with Residents

- **Implement Consistent Assignment.** The common practice of rotating staff assignment is now obsolete. All of the reasons used to defend the practice (preventing burnout, detection of clinical issues, fairness) have been proven, through numerous research studies, to be incorrect. Consistent assignment of staff to the same group of residents fosters strong relationships and efficiencies that lead to better clinical care, lower turnover rates, and higher satisfaction scores.
- **Educate Staff on How to Deal with Challenging Resident Behaviors.** Nursing home staff have higher job satisfaction when they understand why their actions can trigger residents with dementia to act out. Schedule the local Alzheimer's Association to conduct education sessions throughout the year. Make sure the sessions are interactive and staff can ask specific questions about residents.
- **Prevent Shifts Worked Without the Optimal Number of Staff.** Make a concerted effort to staff each shift with an appropriate number of staff to care for the residents. Make sure the staffing coordinator has been well trained and is fair. Have a plan in place to ensure the residents needs are met when a shift is understaffed. For example, housekeepers can help to make the resident beds, dietary staff can help to collect food trays, and the department heads can transport residents and pass meal trays.

Motivate Employees

- **Solicit Staff Feedback.** Keep in touch with your staff by having them fill out employee satisfaction questionnaires. Ensure that the feedback is confidential so that they can be candid. When completed, make sure to present findings to the organization and address issues or concerns quickly based on the survey results.
- **Encourage New Ideas.** Encourage your staff to think of creative ways to solve problems. Invite them to meet with you and offer their solutions to problems facing the

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Web links

National Association of Directors of Nursing Administration in Long Term Care (NADONA/LTC)
www.nadona.org

American Health Care Association (ACHA)
www.ahca.org

<http://eaplist.com>

facility. Meet with new staff and ask them how their previous employer addressed similar problems.

- **Help Staff to Manage Stress.** Studies have shown that all nursing home staff experience high levels of stress, especially when working with disabled, agitated, or cognitively impaired residents. Contract with a vendor who offers an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) so workers and their family members have a resource when they need help. Organizations with EAPs in place have lower absenteeism and higher retention rates. The annual cost of offering a EAP is minimal compared to the cost of turnover.

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