

Case Study: Universal Health Systems

Acute Care Hospitals Revamp their Team and Hit Financial Targets

Background

Chowan and Bertie Memorial Hospitals are two of the seven acute care hospitals that comprise University Health System of Eastern North Carolina. Both CH and BMH are critical access hospitals located in rural northeastern NC.

Back in 2006 the CEO and executive team were fairly new and realized they were struggling to mesh as a unit resulting in disjointed meetings and lackluster results. They engaged a Table Group Consultant to help with the team become more cohesive and strategic.

Approach: Consulting services, books and products

The Table Group Consultant initiated his work by conducting a two-day offsite. During this session they discussed the results from Table Group's Online Team Assessment. This tool measures a team's susceptibility to the Five Dysfunctions. Their report scores came back unfavorable in all five areas. In that first session, the group also discussed the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator providing the first step to understanding one another's personality, leadership style and team dynamics.

The team immediately experienced improvements in their interactions and decided to bring the consultant back for four more sessions over the course of three years. According to Megan Booth-Mills one of the biggest catalysts for change was a change in mind set. She stated, "Executives realized that they did not need to have all the answers. Once we became comfortable openly discussing key issues without hesitation or fear, we opened ourselves to having frank discussions where tough decisions could be made. Part of this change was coming together as an executive team and prioritizing our team's decisions/actions first."

Meetings were another area where the team experienced dramatic improvement. They adopted the *Death by Meeting* model for their team which provided the forum to engage in critical conversations. Over the years, they have developed



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Mike Dacus

CFO

Chowan Hospital/

Bertie Memorial Hospital



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skills to provoke debate and ensure buy-in. They define trust as, "knowing you are going to get honest answers from one another and being vulnerable enough to ask the questions."

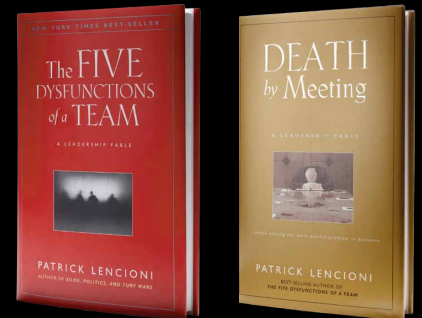
Outcome: Focused leadership leads to financial upside

The results of this team's efforts have been impressive and widespread within the hospital and system. Given some of the difficult decisions the team made, Bertie Memorial Hospital and Chowan Hospital were two of the three regional hospitals in the system to achieve operating margin targets in fiscal year 2009. CFO Mike Dacus stated, "The work we have done around *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* is the reason we are in the position we are today. It saved us." The group has become a solid, high-performing team. CEO Jeff Sackrison stated, "We became open with one another. We made tough decisions, stuck to them and supported each other every step of the way."

These efforts have also been acknowledged publicly. Sackrison received an invitation of honor when asked to speak on his team's process at the HPI National Patient Safety Summit in Scottsdale. This talk focused on how leadership and teamwork advances a culture of patient safety. In another instance, Sackrison requested funds for a special project from the president of the East Carolina Health subsidiary, which includes BMH and CH. This process is usually cumbersome but given the team's successful track record, the president simply stated, "If your team has researched it, I trust it."

Universal Health Systems Uses

The Five Dysfunctions of a Team and Death by Meeting



The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: Online Team Assessment



Table Group Consulting Services

