



SC LTC Leadership Academy Pilot of a New Nursing Home High Value Business Model

A collaboration to strengthen front-line staff retention as the foundation for high performance.

Tip Sheet

Generating Employee Engagement by Investing in Employee Morale

Your core staff are your greatest asset. If you invest in them, you will realize a healthy return through their commitment to the residents and each other. For your highest returns, invest in employee engagement.

WHY:

Employee engagement is the amount of *discretionary effort* and care that employees put into their jobs above and beyond the minimum required. Employees put in higher discretionary effort when they want the organization to succeed because they feel connected emotionally, socially, and spiritually.

Pilot homes invested in employee morale boosting and community building activities to create open communication, recognition of the individual, and a sense of relaxed community with high professional standards. They found that these practices generate an overall positive reaction from staff which contributes to staff stability. Residents feel more comfortable and better cared for when staff is happy. One pilot home leader said, “Stable staff makes everything easier.”

COST and SAVINGS:

All the pilot homes noted that activities have minimal cost but a high positive impact on care and retention. Over the long run, cost savings become significant. Pilot homes’ investments in morale boosting and community building ranged from \$100 a month to \$2500 per month. Some homes with a low budget for morale boosting strategically used employee fundraisers to generate funds for recognition. One administrator uses the staff morale budget as seed money to build a bigger fund that they can use for a staff holiday party. For example, they purchase hot dogs and buns, cook them up and sell them to the staff and visitors for \$2 each.

HOW:

Pilot homes shared these tips:

1. Leader’s positive presence is the first step in boosting morale. Homes described these effective leadership practices: Be available and seen throughout the community. Listen to the staff about what they like and don’t like. Stay in touch with all staff, not just leadership. Leaders set the example of positive interaction.
2. Encourage staff to recognize each other instead of only being recognized by leadership.
3. Celebrate the positives, small wins to start.
4. Follow up on all concerns, even when you can’t do anything about it. Recognize the challenges and acknowledge the issue even when you can’t fix it.
5. Be consistent with activities. Starting something and then not continuing it can be worse than not doing anything because it reinforces distrust among staff.



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MEASURING IMPACT:

Pilot homes measure the impact of their morale boosting efforts through retention rates, filling vacant positions, eliminating nursing registry shifts and satisfaction surveys.

WHAT:

Pilot homes described many wise and low-cost, high yield investments that they make to boost morale and promote community building, such as –

- Painting and renovating the staff breakroom.
- Purchasing a second microwave oven for the staff breakroom.
- Purchasing new chairs at the nursing stations.
- Painting and improving the staff and guest bathrooms.
- Offering free meals for the staff.
- Purchasing plaques for individual staff and trophies for units/neighborhoods.
- Purchasing, writing, and sending thank you cards to the staff.
- Investing in fun community building events such as Halloween Parties, staff talent shows, national nursing home week, etc.

Other morale boosting practices described by the pilot homes take leaders' time, more than money. These practices include:

1. Stay interviews. Some pilot homes' leaders check in with newly hired staff daily during their first few days, and at the end of the first and the second week. They ask if there is anything they can do to help staff settle in and they trouble-shoot issues staff may be having. They describe catching issues early and building strong relationships to retain new staff.
2. Adopt a nurse. One pilot home asked each member of the leadership team to adopt a nurse for Nurses' Week. Each nurse completed an interest inventory. Leaders gave personalized gifts. Even better, they built long-lasting relationships!
3. Employee Satisfaction Check-ins. Several pilot home leaders review satisfaction surveys completed by new employees and circle back to ask about any responses that indicate the situation has room for improvement. This practice has allowed the leaders to catch and address early issues and keep newly hired staff.
4. Employee Appreciation Committee. Many of the pilot homes use employee committees to plan and implement group activities for special occasions. Having staff shape plans builds their engagement and helps ensure that activities match staff's preferences.

ADVICE: Stay consistent. Keep it going. It's like a positive fire. You start it and it will keep growing and spreading. Key to implementation is to keep it inclusive and simple.
