



Learning From Others Inside Our Own Company

Description

I am a huge fan of benchmarking others. When we are trying to solve a problem or improve results, it makes a lot of sense to learn from those who have already figured it out. Seeking out and harvesting best practices from others is a lot more efficient than trying to reinvent the wheel and solve issues ourselves.

While the usual benchmarking requires us to visit other organizations that are achieving the results we want, the really good news is we don't have to go outside our organization to learn better ways of doing things. Sometimes it's a matter of benchmarking our own people.

This was a very valuable lesson I learned at Holy Cross Hospital in Chicago. We were trying to improve our patient satisfaction results. We noticed that one department's patient experience results were considerably better than the rest of the organization.

Michelle Walsko was a nurse manager on the high-performing unit. We asked Michelle, "What are you doing to get such great results?" And she'd always say, "I'm sure nothing different from anybody else." Michelle loved her coworkers, so even if she had known what she was doing differently, she wouldn't have said, "I'm doing this, and they're not."

We couldn't figure out why Michelle's unit had higher results than the others in the organization by looking at the reports and interviewing Michelle. So we sent someone in to observe her. This person noticed that every morning Michelle took the time to talk to every patient on the unit and always asked if there were staff members she could recognize. So he said, "Michelle, I noticed that every morning you visit every patient." And Michelle said, "Doesn't everybody?" Well, the answer was no, but the answer after that was yes.

That was one of the reasons why Holy Cross at that time became one of the leaders in the country in patient satisfaction. We actually went on to become the place other hospitals benchmarked. The key was learning from each other right inside our own organization.

Any organization can do the same. A few tips:

Ask yourself: Which department or individual in our organization is performing well in the area we need to improve? When we drill down this way, we often find solutions that debunk assumptions around why an organization is struggling. We might assume turnover is high because, for instance, a certain job doesn't pay a high salary, but when we look closer, we might find that one department is doing well despite this roadblock.

Go to that department leader or employee and ask, "What's your secret?" Don't be surprised if they can't tell you at first. Often, people don't even realize how good they are at what they do. And since they don't see how others do their job, they may not even realize they're

doing anything differently! You may have to keep digging.

Spend time in that department (or with that person) and pay close attention to what they are doing differently. Once, when working at a hospital that had really high turnover, we found that one department had almost none. We talked to a nurse leader and found that she was meeting with new employees on their 30th and their 90th days—right at the times when new employees are at the biggest risk of leaving—and was asking them certain key questions. The new employees felt valued and appreciated and were more likely to stick around.

Then, cascade that best practice through the organization. Once you realize someone inside your organization has figured out a best practice, you can often get them to train the rest of the staff. When leaders learn how to harvest and move best practices, they create organizations that consistently get great outcomes—not just in one department but in all departments, 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. Best practices are the key to consistent, sustainable performance.

To close, there are two more keys to successfully learning from others in our organization. One is to relate, not compare. We need to focus on similarities rather than differences. While these are healthcare examples, anyone in any industry can learn from them. The same is true inside organizations. Rather than looking at how another department is different from us, we need to get in the habit of looking for commonalities. We may need to modify a best practice a little so that it works for others.

The other key is to stay open to learning. When the student is ready, the teacher appears. The better students we are, the more helpful we can be, and the more useful we can feel. We never stop being students. The further we go, the more we realize we don't know. The more open we are to learning from others, the better we'll be—and the more we'll have to share with those who come after us.

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