



How to Build a Mediocre Organization

Okay, let's throw this out from the beginning, in 20 plus years of consulting for more than 450 health-care organizations; I have never witnessed an organization with an intentionality of creating mediocrity. There is no doubt, however, that it happens. While James Collins' book, "Good to Great" discusses how organizations can make the leap from average to great, other leaders are making decisions that destine their organizations for mediocrity. One article cannot begin to address the entirety of this issue, so the focus here will be on the broader concerns.

No organization achieves greatness without solid leadership and a team capable of working together to gain the desired results. There are many reasons strong performers choose to leave organizations. Studies show the true reasons for leaving are: 1) lack of career development opportunities 2) lack of recognition/appreciation 3) negative work environment 4) financial. Many leaders believe the primary reason our best performers leave is financial, but this reason for leaving is in fourth place. So, what is really going on? There are many reasons that strong performers leave, but those considerations need to be a book and not an article. Our focus here is on leadership behaviors that cause high performers to consider other opportunities and move on.

• **Put the humane in human resources.** As healthcare organizations are continually in a mode of "doing more with less", decisions are made to reduce staff. If done appropriately, the lowest level performers are separated. If those leaving are treated poorly, despite being poor performers, the message to the remaining employees is a negative one. If we fail to communicate to

our high performers of their importance (appreciation) in achieving long term organizational success, these remaining team members will find it difficult to be motivated to give it their all on what they may perceive as "a sinking ship". As one of our clients recently said, "Treat employees well when they are hired and treat them even better when they leave."

• **Communication is the key.** Without a culture of honesty and openness, a new communiqué touting the new order and need to rally together going forward will not carry much weight. Cultures are developed over long periods of time. It takes 5 to 7 years to change a culture, but even one regression to an old behavior can destroy the recently built trust and the process of culture change is forced to begin again. Staying the course and maintaining consistency is critical to gaining trust. Without trust, high performers choose to take those calls from the executive search firms and leave the organization when an opportunity arises that is in alignment with their personal values and cultures.

• **Ethics counts.** When high performers witness or are victims of: breaches of ethics, preferential treatment or other behaviors of questionable judgment by senior leadership, the best performers choose to exit. When leaders demonstrate personal and professional behavior that is not in alignment with the mission and values of the organization, and that behavior is tolerated, those in opposition to those behaviors move on. High standards personally and professionally are a necessity for long term organizational success. We have seen in recent years how the behaviors of a few have taken down some of what had been

the most respected organizations.

• **Recognize achievement.** It has often been said that "great achievements can be made when it doesn't matter who gets the credit". Often seen are situations where it is apparent that "ego has once again gotten in the way of good judgment". It is the responsibility of leaders to hire individuals of integrity that can lead. When the leadership relationship between the leader and his/her direct reports is compromised by taking credit for good ideas or placing blame when a plan goes awry, the organization is led to paralysis and fear becomes an overwhelming force. Hiring the best and retaining them is a necessary goal. Appropriate recognition and rewards for meeting objectives is a requirement for long term success.

• **Are we building mediocrity?** Are we separating the low performers through a well designed program of progressive discipline and/or putting our organization in a position to win by having a solid performance appraisal system in place when we are forced to reduce staff? As we orchestrate staff reductions, are we treating all individuals with respect and dignity? While doing so, are we communicating with all remaining employees and the community that these changes are well thought out, will not affect patient care quality and are in the best interest of the organization's future? Are we creating a culture that limits our ability to

recruit top performers?

Though only touching the tip of the iceberg of what keeps an organization from rising to the top, or moving from a place of prominence to mediocrity, this article is designed to bring to top of mind leaders' decisions and how those decisions invite high performers to decide to either seek new career opportunities or continue to be committed. The departure or recommitment of our best and brightest is in reaction to the words and behaviors of leaders. And it is up to the leaders to make those important decisions. When we separate our weakest performers and fail to embrace our top performers, those top performers leave and we are left with a mediocre organization. Minimal behavioral change can be the difference between success and failure. In the words of Thomas Edison, "Many of life's failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up." The same can be said of organizations ... each of us has a responsibility to not be mediocre.

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WHAT'S NEW... WHAT'S NEW...

SAINTS MARY AND ELIZABETH MEDICAL CENTER OPENS THREE NEW SPECIALTY CLINICS

Saints Mary and Elizabeth Medical Center (SMEMC) in Chicago recently opened three new specialty clinics, including: Ears, Nose and Throat (ENT), Maternal-Fetal Medicine and Neurosurgery. The ENT and Neurosurgery Clinics are located at the Saint Elizabeth Campus. The Maternal-Fetal Medicine Clinic is located at the Saint Mary Campus.

INGALLS OFFERS MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR CHILDREN

Ingalls Behavioral Health Services has launched a new Adolescent Behavioral Health Program that serves children ages 12 – 18. Managed by Synergy Behavioral Healthcare, the program features both inpatient and outpatient services and includes a 20-bed unit housed in the Wyman-Gordon Pavilion.

EDWARD HOSPITAL OFFERS ER WAIT TIMES BY TEXT, ONLINE, PHONE

Edward Hospital is among the first hospitals in the country to make Emergency Room wait times available via text message, online and by phone.

People can text, click, or call to find out how quickly they'll begin treatment in Edward's ER.

Edward's ER wait times are calculated by averaging the time from when a patient arrives and checks in to the time they are placed in a room where treatment begins, commonly referred to as the "door to treatment area" time. The wait times are updated every 15 minutes.

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