

Employee Development:

A Prescription for Better Healthcare

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Many of the challenges facing healthcare organizations today relate directly to their employees, including serious shortages in critical occupations, high turnover rates, a looming “retirement bubble” and the skills required by the increasing complexity of the medical fields. These issues, left unchecked, increase operational costs and could undermine quality of care. Increasingly healthcare organizations across the county are seeking solutions in the development of the skills of their employees and offering new opportunities for advancement through learning and career development. They are finding that employee learning and development can be a valuable strategy in raising workforce skills, filling critical jobs, reducing turnover, attracting new talent, and adapting to an environment of ever changing technologies, regulations, and changing patient demographics.



Overview of Findings

In this report, CAEL identifies eight exemplary practices of healthcare organizations in employee learning and development:

- 1 | Leadership Promotes Education and Training Through Vision and Commitment**
- 2 | Employee Learning and Development Are Aligned with Business Goals**
- 3 | Leadership Development Is Emphasized at All Levels of the Organization**
- 4 | Structured, Individual Career Development and Growth Is Emphasized**
- 5 | Internal Structures Are Developed for Informal Learning and Knowledge Management**
- 6 | There Is Strategic Use of Technology for Meeting Learning Objectives**
- 7 | Alliances with External Partners Are Central to Learning Strategy**
- 8 | Assessment of Impact Is Emphasized**

In looking at the ways in which organizations operationalize these practices, we found that what makes an organization exemplary is not whether the leaders have been successful at implementing all eight practices, but rather the degree to which they have linked the practices they do implement in a sustained and comprehensive way. These organizations design and implement initiatives that address multiple practices at the same time, approaching learning and development strategically. Organizations that do this are able to create an environment where employees are energized and also committed and focused on individual skills development, improved patient care, and customer service.

Overview of Findings *continued*

The exemplary practices apply to a wide range of healthcare organizations, including hospitals, hospital systems, long-term care facilities, and healthcare clinics, that focus on the development of the non-physician workforce. They can serve as a guide to other organizations who are facing similar issues of employee and skill shortages, succession planning needs, and diversity concerns. The following pages provide examples of how each of the practices is carried out by different organizations. In our full report, CAEL provides additional details on the practices, as well as case studies that show what comprehensive approaches to learning and development look like in a variety of organizational settings.

Approach

The starting point for identifying exemplary practices in employee learning and development in healthcare organizations was a 2002 CAEL report on exemplary practices in workforce development across all industries in Chicago. *WorkforceChicago2.0: Advancing Corporate Excellence Through Exemplary Practices in Employee Learning and Development* identified the exemplary practices in employee learning and development that emerged from our study of more than 46 organizations nominated by their peers.

For healthcare, CAEL was able to build on our WorkforceChicago2.0 research, adapting our list of exemplary practices to directly apply to healthcare organizations. To do this, we drew from a number of resources such as a review of research literature on the healthcare workforce, results from a national survey of 48 healthcare organizations, in-depth phone conversations with 16 healthcare administrators, and site visits to seven representative organizations that have been successful in putting together a comprehensive approach to employee learning and development. The 16 organizations interviewed are listed to the right; and the seven organizations that we visited are in blue.

Exemplary Practices for Employee Development in Healthcare Organizations

CAEL identified the following elements of a comprehensive approach as exemplary because of their importance in helping healthcare organizations reach their organizational learning goals and meet their current and future workforce needs. The eight elements are defined on the following pages along with examples of their implementation.

- 1 Baptist Healthcare**
Pensacola, FL
- 2 Bellevue Hospital**
New York, NY
- 3 Ben Taub General Hospital**
Houston, TX
- 4 BJC HealthCare**
St. Louis, MO
- 5 Clarian Health Partners**
Indianapolis, IN
- 6 Evangelical Lutheran Good Samaritan Society**
Sioux Falls, SD
- 7 Huntsville Hospital**
Huntsville, AL
- 8 Multicare Health System**
Tacoma, WA
- 9 Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center**
Boise, ID
- 10 Saint Mary's Health Center**
St. Louis, MO
- 11 St. Clare Hospital and Health Services**
Baraboo, WI
- 12 St. James Mercy Health**
Hornell, NY
- 13 Sun Healthcare Group**
Irvine, CA
- 14 Truman Medical Center**
Kansas City, MO
- 15 University of Chicago Hospitals and Health**
Chicago, IL
- 16 University of Pennsylvania Health System**
Philadelphia, PA

LEADERSHIP PROMOTES **Education & Training** through vision & commitment

1



At the Good Samaritan Society, the “Growing Our Program” holds formal recognition for its graduates. This event enriches the pride of accomplishment for students. In addition to the Society recognition, employees attend the official graduation exercise with The University of South Dakota. For many, it is not only their first graduation, but may be the first postsecondary graduation in the employee’s family. The mentoring by the Center Director of Nursing, Administrator and Staff Development Coordinator symbolizes the importance of learning and career advancement to everyone at the Society. In fact, after attending one recognition event, a resident who saw the pride it engendered and understood the role of learning in the quality of care he received donated \$100,000 to continue to develop the center’s employees.

*- from the GSS newsletter,
The Good Samaritan*

In organizations with exemplary approaches to learning and development, the CEO and senior management are driving forces in highlighting the importance of those initiatives. They promote education and training in a number of different ways.

First, they communicate the importance of learning to the staff. At many of the interviewed organizations, the CEO participates in every new employee orientation to introduce him or herself, share the organization’s mission vision and values, and communicate the importance of the workforce to excellent patient care. At these sessions, the CEO often stresses the importance of each employee’s continuous learning and development. At an institution where this practice is deeply embedded, the message about the importance of learning continues well beyond orientation. Organizations that demonstrate a commitment to learning and development often promote learning goals and opportunities in regular employee newsletters, quarterly course catalogues for internal and external learning programs, and paycheck stuffers. Employees at Clarian, for example, describe receiving e-mails, cards and phone calls from the CEO or board members congratulating them on educational accomplishments.

One other way that key leaders show their commitment is by being directly involved in learning initiatives, either in planning or in teaching some classes (e.g., a module of a leadership training program). At University of Chicago Hospitals, for example, the CEO teaches the opening module of the organization’s leadership program, introducing the competencies expected of leaders. CEOs can also show a commitment to learning by providing financial resources and other investments and by holding themselves accountable for meeting employee learning goals.

2

EMPLOYEE **Learning & Development** are aligned with Business Goals

Leading healthcare organizations invest in their employees to benefit the organization, and their investments are expected to yield a return to the business. Aligning learning and development with business goals is not just an exemplary practice, but a fundamental one. Organizations that recognize this fact give learning a place of strategic importance in the organization and intentionally link business goals with individual learning goals. This strategic approach results in learning that is embedded in most, if not all, organizational activities and changes.

Learning is positioned strategically within the organization, with activities overseen by a Chief Learning Officer or other high-ranking leader who is part of the executive team and reports directly to the CEO. Learning strategies are linked to all major organizational plans and initiatives and the learning division (or, in some cases, the corporate university) of the organization is a full partner in planning the future of the organization as it carries out its work. The strategic plan of the organization may also include learning goals for the organization and its workforce, and individual performance reviews may include a process for linking individual learning goals back to the organization's business goals. Organizations like St. Clare, for example, issue "passports" to their employees that list the mission, core values, and strategic initiatives and measures. Employees are charged with filling in the "entity goals" for their department (e.g., improve employee satisfaction), their department's goals and measures, and personal goals and measures.

Organizations also design special initiatives to address specific issues such as worker and skill shortages, retention issues, workforce diversity, patient care, and succession planning. For example, to help with retaining employees, Clarian offers the Gift of Caregiving program, a two day retreat that focuses on putting people back in touch with the reasons they went into healthcare. Other noteworthy retention strategies include Missouri Baptist's mentoring programs for nurses and UPHS's year-long Nurse Residency Program to help orient newly-graduated nurses (Missouri Baptist is part of BJC HealthCare).

Healthcare organizations are also finding that one of the best ways to fill high-demand, skilled positions, while helping to retain employees, is to create internal career advancement opportunities. Organizations are offering programs and incentives that are designed to help their incumbent workers gain the skills and credentials required for key positions. Some organizations provide special scholarships to employees who choose to pursue training in areas where the organization is experiencing shortages. Employers like the University of Chicago Hospitals and the Good Samaritan Society are developing learning opportunities along a career ladder, focusing primarily on the position facing the greatest shortage: nursing.

LEARNING DEVELOPMENT is **emphasized** at all Levels of the Organization

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“James”, a Human Resources Specialist, was attracted to employment at St. Clare because of the educational assistance and loan forgiveness programs, opportunities to advance, and stability of employment. He is the Chair of the Employee Council, which looks at learning needs, employee satisfaction issues, and educational programs. He is rapidly becoming a “go to” person in HR, answering employees’ questions regarding their benefits and services. The current HR director is working with him to develop his advancement potential as part of the hospital’s commitment to mentoring and succession planning. He is currently enrolled in an MBA program, a requirement of the director position, by taking advantage of St. Clare’s tuition program, while continuing to take on increased responsibilities.

Most organizations that provide internal training also offer special training to employees in leadership positions. Healthcare organizations that are thinking strategically about succession planning, which is of critical importance given the looming “retirement bubble,” are also focusing their leadership development on all levels of the organization. In practice, this means having systems and processes for identifying and developing leaders. Two organizations we visited – UPHS and UCH – have formal processes for identifying and developing potential leaders at all levels of the organization. In both models, the organization encourages managers to actively identify potential leaders from the beginning of their career, work with them to connect them to other promising leaders, encourage them to participate in formal and informal learning opportunities, provide them with mentors, and expose them to leadership forums, speakers and seminars.



One way to give employees the chance to demonstrate leadership potential is shown by St. Clare, which is designing an internal governance structure based on Leadership Councils. The Councils are internal committees staffed by an integrated group of physicians, nurses and administrators. This interdisciplinary team is responsible for the decision-making and planning of all departments, as well as addressing learning and development needs. This provides informal leadership development, while also providing a way for non-supervisors to demonstrate and more fully develop their leadership potential.

Even without a formal leadership development program, organizations can demonstrate their commitment to building leadership at all levels by providing clear evidence that employees can successfully work their way up the ranks of the organization over time.

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STRUCTURED, INDIVIDUAL CAREER **Development & Growth** is EMPHASIZED

Strategic approaches to employee learning and development recognize that individual learning and development provide great benefits to the organization. At the same time, exemplary organizations also recognize that in order for these programs to be successful, individual employees must want to participate, not assume burdens in doing so, and take some responsibility for setting and achieving their learning goals. All of the organizations we interviewed offer generous packages for learning and development, including tuition reimbursement and special scholarships. Some encouraged their managers to provide flexibility in scheduling for workers attending classes. A few, such as Clarian and St. Alphonsus, provide individual career and educational advising on an ongoing basis to inform and guide employees.

Healthcare organizations can also engage employees in educational pursuits by putting them in the driver's seat – giving them control over their learning choices and input into the programs offered internally. In several of the organizations we visited, employee tuition assistance programs allowed for broad choices, with few, if any, restrictions on what kinds of courses employees could take. In some, the learning staff regularly gains information on the strengths and weaknesses of learning and development programs through focus groups and surveys. In this way, the learning staff has guidance from learners on how to improve existing programs and what additional programs or services might still be needed.

Finally, to create interest in learning opportunities and to help make learning even more worthwhile for individuals to pursue, healthcare organizations seeking high participation in learning activities offer several forms of positive reinforcement. Some organizations award learners additional pay or one-time bonuses for completing credential or degree programs. But the real “carrot” for employees is the potential for career advancement and job satisfaction. Exemplary organizations let their employees know that there is a connection between learning and advancement opportunities. These organizations encourage and support employees who seek to advance.

St. Clare is developing competencies for all of its positions, and will use these...to describe the position to new employees, identify learning needs, and indicate learning needs for advancement into new positions. The competency lists are available on the organization's intranet.

INTERNAL STRUCTURES ARE Developed for Informal Learning & Knowledge Management

Although formal learning that leads to credentials is highly valued by both healthcare organizations and their employees, there is growing recognition that most of what people know about their jobs is learned informally.

Healthcare organizations are investing in both formal and informal learning in an effort to achieve their organizational goals. Investment in informal learning, however, is still only a fraction of the investment in formal learning since there is relatively little knowledge and experience of how to structure a program, measure the impact, and provide credit for informal learning. It requires embedding learning strategies in knowledge management and communication systems, incorporating the real challenges faced by employees on their jobs in the learning process, and turning employees into knowledge workers. Employees also need to learn how to process and apply what they have learned informally.

“Carl,” a physical therapist at UPHS, believes that the Delta Team shows how influential the individual can be by demonstrating how one person can help improve patient safety within the work site. “Each day I work with between 10 to 13 patients, and so much of my time with my patients involves educating them about safety during daily activities,” he explains. “Being a part of the Delta Team is about being able to share and learn from the experiences of fellow professionals throughout UPHS and use this information to help educate co-workers about patient-safety issues.”

- from UPHS “System News”,
March 2004

Many of the interviewed organizations are in the early stages of developing an organizational approach to informal learning and are seeking methods for structuring informal learning opportunities. These methods include brief in-service modules, online job aids and other knowledge management resources, systems and processes to help employees learn from each other (e.g., job shadowing and mentoring), as well as fostering communities of practice. The Good Samaritan Society, for example, has just launched a new mentoring program for advanced CNAs to serve as mentors to new CNAs, and BJC offers a mentoring program for nurses re-entering the profession.



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THERE IS STRATEGIC use of **Technology** for Meeting Learning Objectives

Technology has become an indispensable resource in helping organizations meet their learning needs. Innovative technologies are used to support and reinforce learning, deliver and manage education and training offerings, and to obtain input and feedback on education and learning programs. It was particularly clear from our site visits that technology can be a powerful tool for communication, instructional delivery, management and sharing of information and offerings, and knowledge management. The benefits include delivery of high quality programs across large and diverse systems, use of scale economies, ability to provide flexible scheduling, convenience, and self-directed study. Even the most technology-savvy organizations, however, are still learning how to use their systems to the fullest, and are continuing to improve them and expand their reach.

Technology has changed the way most organizations communicate internally, making it easier to provide information to employees and to gain timely feedback on programs and services. Organizations such as Truman issue weekly e-mails to their employees that communicate learning opportunities, and most organizations we interviewed offered a considerable amount of information about their internal learning programs (often entire course catalogues) online.

Healthcare organizations are increasing the use of technology in their delivery of instruction. Many of the interviewed organizations offered online learning of some kind. The benefits from using online and other distance learning techniques are many. The organizations find that the online programs enable employees to access learning on their own time, and online learning programs can allow for individual customization. An exemplary practice is Good Samaritan Society's Distance Learning Network (DLN), which provides access to centrally produced learning opportunities via a broadcasting studio and 24/7 satellite network. Technology has also improved the capacity for assessment of learning. Online modules often incorporate an assessment tool, which allows the individual and education managers to know how successful the training was.

Some healthcare organizations offer an online learning portal where employees can access online courses, resources and job aids, career development information, and a record of the individual's own learning activities. Clarian's Electronic Learning Management System (ELMS), for example, helps learners register for either live or electronic courses or training and manage their own learning and development.

"Amanda" has worked at Clarian for 16 years in food services. For the past six months, she has been in Basic Skills Training improving her math skills using the PLATO computer program. She is studying fractions, decimals, percentages and word problems. Her next task is to tackle an English review (parts of speech and sentence construction). "Right now I'm satisfied with where I am [with my career]. I'm refreshing my mind in math and English skills, because it has been a while since high school," she says. She adds that PLATO has helped her build confidence as well as skills. Before she began, she had no computer skills. Learning how to use PLATO taught her basic computer skills as an added benefit."

- from the Clarian "Pathfinder",
December 2003



STRUCTURED, INDIVIDUAL CAREER Partners are Central to Learning Strategy

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Healthcare organizations have found that partnerships with external organizations are a tremendous asset to their success in leveraging their resources. The most common partnerships occur with postsecondary institutions such as community colleges and nursing schools. Often healthcare organizations leverage the partnership to customize degree and certificate programs, as well as non-credit offerings, to help fill high demand positions in nursing and radiology. Many organizations arrange with their educational partners to offer degree and certificate programs on-site or online, which would enable the workforce to have geographically convenient options for increasing their skills for higher level jobs. The Good Samaritan Society and University of Chicago Hospitals, meanwhile, have worked with local providers to establish a series of on-site, cohort programs for each step of the nursing ladder.

Partnerships with educational institutions can also provide healthcare organizations access to their recent graduates as a way to expand the pool of candidates for employment. But postsecondary institutions are not the only good sources for recruiting new employees. Many of the interviewed organizations have partnerships with publicly-funded or community-based workforce development entities – and, in some cases, high schools – that help with screening and training of job candidates.

Many of the interviewed organizations also established close relationships with other healthcare organizations for a variety of purposes, including learning consortia, shared recruitment, and the sharing of information and best practices. Pooling resources can be particularly important for addressing regional labor market concerns.

Yvette, an RN at UCH, recently received her BSN through the hospital's partnership program with St. Xavier University. "Not having the degree was holding me back" in terms of career development. Taking courses right where she works helped her reach her professional development goals. "The only way I could see doing this while working is by taking classes where I work," she says. "Without the financial help and the convenience, I don't think I could have done it. It would have taken so much longer." The cohort model was also viewed positively by Yvette. "It was a big help to have other University of Chicago Hospitals nurses going through the program with me. We supported each other, went over course information together, and became like family with fellow students and faculty."

- from UCH Academy Quarterly,
Winter/Spring 2004

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ASSESSMENT of Impact is EMPHASIZED

Healthcare organizations that invest heavily in employee learning and development, and that use learning programs in a strategic way, want to know that their efforts have been worthwhile and where improvement is needed.

Exemplary organizations use a variety of quantitative and qualitative measurement strategies to assess the impact of their training and development investments. They identify key indicators and establish systems for data collection, track and analyze results related to the business goals of the organization, and reference the collected data for continuous improvement.

At a minimum, most organizations that offer training programs use participant feedback surveys while some carry out pre-and post-testing. Despite the difficulty in measuring the impact of learning programs on an organization's bottom line, many healthcare organizations we interviewed regularly track and analyze data in an effort to show the importance of employee development to the business of healthcare. Several organizations track indirect measures related to system-wide objectives such as: staff satisfaction, the number of graduates, retention in training program, degree completions, retention rates of learner vs. non-learners, internal advancement, and improvements in patient care, staffing ratios, and cost savings. BJC, for example, measures quarterly the organization's five Key Result Areas (KRA), one of which is workforce development. The indicators used to measure the impact of workforce development initiatives are the vacancy rate, the number of days to fill beds, the turnover rate and the retention rate.

Many of the interviewed organizations reported significant drops in vacancy and turnover rates that they credited largely to their learning initiatives. St. James Mercy's RN vacancy rate dropped from 15% to under 5% in three years, Clarian's vacancy rates dropped 6 percentage points over two years, the Good Samaritan Society's turnover of CNAs dropped more than 16 percentage points in one year, and University of Pennsylvania Health System's nurse vacancy rate decreased by nearly 10 percentage points and the turnover rate decreased by nearly 15 percentage points.

Tracking and analyzing data can be useful for confirming that learning programs and initiatives are achieving what they have been designed to do. Tracking can also help to readily provide information to managers on staff participation in mandatory training. It also helps with the continuous improvement of learning programs themselves. Participant satisfaction data, for example, was used by Good Samaritan Society to determine the best scheduling times, define strategies for better integration of formal learning into the workplace, develop shorter learning sessions, and make distance learning available around the clock.

St. Alphonsus has calculated a **\$90,000 cost savings** in converting its classroom-based courses to e-learning formats.

UCH found that there is **90% retention of employees** studying in cohort groups compared to only 50% retention for employees completing their degrees independently with tuition assistance.

Living and Breathing the Practices: Taking a Comprehensive Approach to Learning and Development Systems

All healthcare organizations have employee education and training programs that address mandatory training requirements in safety, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), and other areas. A comprehensive approach, however, goes beyond the mandatory training needs of an organization by recognizing the important strategic role of employee learning and development in supporting organizational change goals and in providing opportunities for employees to maximize their potential.

In many of the organizations we visited, learning is fully integrated into the environment and endorsed as a factor in all activities, including individual performance and advancement, retaining and recruiting staff, implementing new management structures, preparing for new facilities and equipment, improving processes, and cutting costs. In organizations that have integrated learning in a comprehensive way, various learning and development initiatives complement and support one another in the development of a learning organization. A critical piece of this comprehensive approach is a CEO who is actively involved in the design, process, promotion and delivery of learning and development activities.

Our case study organizations demonstrate that this approach benefits the organization in a number of ways. Having a dynamic and integrated approach to employee learning and development, which is supported and promoted by the top leadership of the organization, strengthens the overall health of the organization. A sustainable learning system also enables the organization to adapt better to continuing changes in technology, healthcare methods, market demands, and regulations. Another benefit is improving the image of the organization. A dynamic and comprehensive employee learning and development program helps to make the organization an employer of choice, which is highly valued by employees as well as by external parties, including patients.

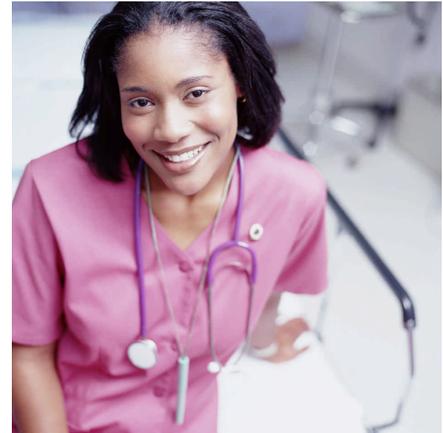
“Kelly”, an LPN and the staff development/human resources coordinator at the North Central Good Samaritan Center, is impressed with the amount of support she receives through the “Growing Our Own” Program. “We are a small facility with six employees currently participating in the University of South Dakota RN program. Having the USD program with the active support of our project director is great. I waited about 10 years for a program that allowed me to pursue a RN degree without driving and the distance from my family. This is a positive outreach for rural communities. We are providing a vital service not just for our residents, but our employees as well.”

Applying the Model

As healthcare organizations think strategically about learning and development, the exemplary practices model presented in this report can be a useful tool. Chief Learning Officers or Human Resources leaders can use exemplary practices to:

- **Identify existing critical issues that may be addressed by learning and development initiatives**
- **Share examples of exemplary practices with their own leadership to help foster new ideas and make strategic connections between existing programs and organizational goals**
- **Examine how practices can be implemented within their own organization to enhance existing programs or to find ways to develop comprehensive approaches to new learning and development challenges**
- **Include the model in strategic planning discussions to help in designing strategic responses that can also serve as building blocks for organizational culture change**
- **Serve as general benchmarks for reviewing their own initiatives to measure learning and development strengths within the organizations as well as identifying areas for improvement**

Building on the findings of this report, CAEL is in the process of developing both a process and tools for working with individual healthcare organizations to assess current strengths in employee learning and development, using the exemplary practices as a point of departure. These tools will also help organizations think strategically about next steps in developing a learning culture. CAEL will draw from its own work in identifying and fostering exemplary practices in adult learning and will help organizations connect the appropriate practices to the goals they wish to achieve.



Conclusion

Learning and development have become integral to the strategies and operations of leading healthcare organizations. They are using a number of different approaches to address their employee learning and development needs. The most successful ones are approaching learning strategically, using a range of exemplary practices, and gaining strong backing and promotion from the executive level. The eight practices identified in this study can be a useful guide for understanding the various pieces contributing to the whole. The case studies provide actual examples of successful initiatives that help to build a comprehensive approach to learning and development and create learning organizations.

For additional information about the study and how to use the exemplary practices model in your organization, please contact Phyllis Snyder, Regional Vice President of CAEL at psnyder@cael.org.



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