

A Growth Strategy: Making Training Work Within Your Organization

Corporate Health Group

Cost containment is a predominant theme in healthcare organizations across the country. Having accomplished many of the goals for reducing costs, organizations are realizing that future profitability will not be gained simply by cutting costs. So healthcare systems are beginning to define growth strategies in order to increase revenue opportunities. Through a business or retail approach to working with customers, organizations are investing in growth strategies to build better services, deliver the service as promised and manage customer trust and loyalty.

Success with this new approach depends on the ability of your team to develop services that meet the customer's expectations and package and position these services in a way that demonstrates the benefits to the customer. Healthcare systems face the very real challenge of establishing and differentiating the value and benefits of their services. Your staff's ability to meet this challenge is critical to your organization's growth.

Why Bother with Another New Strategy?

Think about your recent shopping experiences. Which vendors or stores do you return to over and over again? Who will you "never do business with again"? All customers of healthcare organizations measure your organization by the retail benchmarks we experience in our everyday lives. Healthcare is being measured against the best products, stores, Web sites and staff in the world.

Two common factors behind the growth of these successful companies are the people they hire and the guidance they provide these people. But with the cost containment, budgeting and outsourcing trends that have taken place over the past twenty years within healthcare, there has been a decline in staff growth and development.

As you confront survival or growth opportunities in today's healthcare environment, it is vitally important that you hire and retain the right people and provide ongoing assistance with their development. As part of your growth strategy, staff should understand the philosophy of your organization, what makes the organization special for the patient and other customers and what expectations you have of them. They will then be able to grow into valued employees that can exemplify the organization, ensure delivery and develop long-term relationships with customers.

It's a New Day. Start Now.

Build a plan that provides for continuing growth at all stages of the employee's development within your organization, service line and/or customer group. This growth plan should include staff development time that can be formal or informal and can unfold one-on-one or in a group. Giving your people what they need to know – real-world information – which they can apply directly and immediately, does make a difference. Measure not just their participation in following the plan but what they do with the information you provide to them.

Your growth strategy should be customized to your services – focused on understanding the customer's needs and demonstrating your organization's ability to meet them. Your growth plan should clearly define the methods you will use to coach employees on how to best do their jobs.

An expert facilitator from within or outside of your organization should show your team how to bring customers in the door and how to keep them and increase their business. The strategies may include:

- Relationship skills, product information, negotiation expertise and service skills.
- Company and industry knowledge.
- Product packaging and internal operations (how we deliver the product).
- Business development planning, prospecting, understanding needs and positioning your services as a benefit-driven solution to these needs
- Clearly defined minimum expectation standards for each employee.

Role-playing and scripting are an important part of your plan because they give your staff a chance to try out the newly learned skills. To generate success with your growth strategy initiative, your staff must walk away with the knowledge needed to build and nurture long-term relationships with your customers.

Who Will Benefit From A Growth Strategy Approach?

Staff responsible for developing new business, managing operations, delivering services and supporting the customer can participate in staff development as a team. To present a consistent message to your target markets and customers, consider providing skill development for all of your organization's staff responsible for building business with physicians, employers, consumers and payers. This group may include:

- Account executives/Business development representatives
- Physician liaisons
- Customer service representatives
- Service line directors/Program managers
- Managed care representatives
- Billing – customer response staff
- Public relations, marketing, planning staff
- Administration

By including operations and clinical staff in the staff development component of your growth strategy, customer retention should improve. Invite program managers and service line directors to join in. Create team accountabilities for customer retention and growth. Have them understand that all of the staff is on the same team and should work together in order to succeed.

Break into teams allowing the business development and operations/clinical staff to work together on common problems and develop joint solutions. This approach provides a better understanding of each other's roles. Such exercises help them to become more productive and result in greater ownership and spirit of cooperation. And the operations/clinical staff may also discover that some of their services will need to be restructured in order to be more "marketable" and to better meet the customer's needs.

Who is an Expert Facilitator?

Your expert facilitator should provide skill development as part of your growth strategy. Your expert facilitator must understand the healthcare environment and its customer populations. They should know how to grow your business. The expert facilitator must be able to help your staff communicate a consistent message about your organization's benefits as they build

relationships with customers. For this reason, your expert facilitator should have experience in the development and implementation of growth strategies, an ability to communicate their expertise and an intimate knowledge of healthcare and your services.

To have credibility with your team, the expert facilitator should know how to work with customers and use relevant stories from his or her own experience, which prove they understand the customer relationship and business development process, as well as what you have to offer. The expert facilitator should encourage participation from all attendees and allow questions to be asked and answered.

Research your expert facilitator options. Who can collaborate best with your team and management to respond to your needs? Who has a solid understanding of your service offerings? Who best knows your industry? Good expert facilitators should be able to effectively deliver several hours of important content to your team. They should be dynamic, exciting and “into” your products and services. It comes down to personality, experience and the ability to convey relevant material.

If you choose to go outside of your organization to find an expert facilitator, talk to other healthcare organizations that have used the person(s) you are considering. Ask questions related to program content, staff response, their ability to translate skill development into real-world use, return on investment and ongoing growth strategy support.

What About Ongoing Support?

As a manager, you can play a key role in educating your team. Even though you spend much of your time managing staff and mapping out strategies, always take time to develop customer accounts. Don't lose sight of the customer's experience nor your staff's performance in the field. The most effective managers spend time in the field with their team. Ride along with them at least a few hours each month. It is an excellent way to coach them and determine where they need additional skill development.

Provide ongoing education. If you employ an experienced staff, implement a mentoring program that pairs new team members with successful, experienced colleagues. If you have a very limited number of staff, bring your expert facilitator back to provide ongoing support to your team. This support can be in the form of periodic telephone meetings to answer questions, review materials, continue role-playing or further develop the growth strategy. This may also take the form of face-to-face, one-on-one time in the field with your customers.

The Bottom Line

Your staff should present a consistent message about your organization to whomever they are talking to: employers, physicians, consumers or payers. The development and implementation of a growth strategy that includes skill enrichment is one of the best ways to ensure that your organization's business development efforts result in increased market share and profitability.



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