

## Creating a Culture Primed for a Successful Implementation

**By: Laurie Slater, Consultant, CHG**

Implementing organizational change can be a difficult task. But all leaders have to face it at some point. It's becoming more and more inevitable with today's accelerated change invading most organizations.

Successful change implementers focus energy on “the who”—the people—and “the how”—the process of transition required to take place for change to have an effect. They make a conscious effort to use open and honest communication within each step of the process because they recognize that this is a critical component.

Valley Health System in Ridgewood, N.J., is participating in such a strategy. The organization conducted a program assessment in recent months and currently is rolling out a newly formed centralized physician relations team.

Creating a culture that was ready to embrace these changes was crucial and top of the list for Director of Physician Relations Beverly Miller.

“When we first began talking about undertaking a strategic review of our physician relations department, we knew we could be opening a Pandora’s box,” she says. “But after eight years of doing things pretty much the same way, we knew we were long overdue for a tune-up and we knew we had some major issues to address.”

With all of the emphasis on outpatient growth at Valley Health System, many directors had been encouraging their technical staff to make phone calls and visits to physician offices. While the intention was good, the results found over 50 different people visiting offices—with no coordination on timing, frequency or messaging.

### **“The Who:” Begin with the people involved or affected by the change.**

Seek to understand who may be affected and then understand how those affected may react to the change. There are many emotions tied to change because it upsets familiarity. Think through a time where you dealt with change and how this created havoc with your emotions.

Understanding and being cognizant of the repercussions of change and knowingly communicating them shows your compassion and helps others to process how their familiarity may change.

**“The Who:” Leverage and gain buy-in from key stakeholders and option leaders.**

You can't assume that other leaders will be on board and support the change; so, identify those closest to the process for their opinions. Gather thought leaders' opinions first before inviting them to meetings. Many early discussions can lend a hand in the progression. Again, change affects everyone from top to bottom.

“The first step in our process was to create a sense of urgency,” notes Miller. “That was as simple as conducting a survey with our management staff to determine how many people were actually doing visits to physician offices.

“Calling in Corporate Health Group was a big factor to our success in getting all of the stakeholders on board,” she adds. “We created a plan for CHG to interview all key executive staff members, directors, managers and service line leaders, and also meet with physician leaders. These people were asked for their input on the current thoughts about the program and where they saw it going in the future. Then, we created a think tank made up of our COO and four other VPs with responsibilities in business development, planning and marketing.”

**“The How:” Share the vision and over-communicate each step in the plan.**

Plan to explain the results of your assessment continuously with both the team and Leadership. It's crucial that the group hears the plan a number of times and in different ways as a part of the process.

The plan should be coupled with explanations as to why the change is occurring. Present a vision of how the change will roll out, stopping at each stage in the action plan to address concerns and answer any questions they may have. They may not agree on “the what” but they can give feedback regarding “the how.”

At this stage, it's important to gain the opinions of the impending action steps. Listen and respond appropriately to their needs—even if the direction doesn't change.

Miller says assembling the think tank group and sharing their results of the interviews with them was a crucial piece of the entire process.

“Our reorganization had to be budget-neutral, so the process involved some tricky negotiations for moving staff from other departments into Physician Relations. Because the group felt like they were part of the process from the beginning, no one protected their turf or exhibited silo behavior. The entire team saw the value in centralizing the sales effort and it was easy to show them how a centralized team would positively impact their own departments.”

**“The Who and The How:” Seek feedback during and after implementation.**

After implementing, take time to monitor how each step is progressing. Go back to the thought leaders of the group and find out how things are progressing. Are the action steps meeting the anticipated needs of the group? Does any step need to be adjusted?

Check in with the team members most affected with the change. How are they responding? Do they feel a sense of accomplishment? What suggestions might they have about the action plan?

Miller says with a newly centralized team in place at Valley Health System, the organization knows during post implementation that it will need to focus on several goals. They plan to strengthen their foundation by conducting sales and territory management training and service line training, as well as training with service line managers who meet with the physician relations staff, and installing new CRM software to track visits and provide trending data.

### **Celebrate your accomplishments.**

As difficult as change may be, a true sense of accomplishment can also be felt within the team as you learn to celebrate each win. Each step that is measured and accomplished should be rewarded. Praising the team will enable a continued positive effect.

Over time, the change will become a norm with the organization. And if primed properly, this can happen sooner rather than later.

It doesn't mean the journey will always be easy, as Miller can attest.

“Our process involved significant changes for many people, but I believe that involving key stakeholders from the beginning and helping them see the benefits that could be achieved for the entire organization are what made our reorganization a success.”