



Transforming Culture

I. "The first step toward change is awareness..."

- *What do you know about your hospital's values? Are they posted?*
- *Have you ever had a conversation with someone in your hospital about its stated values?*
- *Do you know how the hospital's values are perceived within the organization?*
- *How are the values reinforced internally?*

According to Nitsa Lallas, partner and healthcare practice leader for Senn Delaney, a culture shaping firm, spending time with the leadership team can tell you a lot about the culture of an organization. "How hospital leaders behave is more important than what they say. We call this Shadow of the Leader. Is how they behave matching what they say? What example are they setting? Are they walking the talk?" says Ms. Lallas. The leadership shadow cast by members of this team and the overall team can be telling of a hospital's true culture.

A few things to consider:

These questions about your leadership team can be effective for revealing the leader or leadership team's shadow in order to discover your hospital's cultural priorities.

"Culture is a business issue. It's not 'soft and fluffy,'" says Carol Geffner, PhD, co-founder and president of Newpoint Healthcare Advisors. "Ultimately, culture determines what is and is not acceptable inside of an organization, and that directly impacts business processes and performance."

"Values can be very important. But, you don't know whether people 'walk the talk' every day or if they are just values on a wall. The questions about culture should be about the origin of values, how they are reinforced and how they are reflected. This could yield rich conversation," says Ms. Geffner. The following questions are a great way to start the conversation and to dig deeper for a better picture of how the organization's culture functions.

- *Are the values used as criteria for hiring new executive leadership?*
- *How are new team members oriented to the hospital's values?*
- *How do the leaders engage and inspire employees to live the hospital's values?*

Your company culture consists of two key elements: your business's underlying intent, and the people you bring together to carry it out. Today, there are more windows into your company's culture than ever before. Identifying possible fractures in your culture requires courage and hard work.

II. “... The second step is acceptance.” ~Nathaniel Branden

Here are some questions created by ASAP to assist in evaluating your hospital’s culture, environment and patient safety mindset. More formalized employee surveys will tell you some of the picture, but response bias may skew their truthfulness or accuracy, especially if there’s any fear of retribution. Consider anecdotal evidence and casual feedback as unscientific proof. And make no mistake — your instinct counts for a lot. It works in families as well as businesses: if you think your company might be dysfunctional, it almost always is.

Questions:

1. Is the overall attitude and mood of your staff positive? Friendly? Would your patients say the same?
2. Are there sub-cultures at your hospital? What is done to ensure they are in line with the stated values?
3. Do departments and specialties interact or do they operate in silos?
4. Would your staff say there is a caste system between administrators, doctors, nurses and staff?
5. Is there an overall sense of camaraderie and friendship? Is it the same across job levels?
6. Are front line staff publicly acknowledged or rewarded for positive efforts? Do employees organize activities such as birthday or work anniversary celebrations?
7. How do you ensure employees feel like they’re informed and in the loop about important information?
8. Do you know who the respected “informal leaders” are in your organization? Do you seek their input?
9. Is the tone and tenor of employee communication friendly, positive, and constructive?
10. Do your administrators walk the floor and engage with employees or totally rely on department heads for employee feedback and communication?
11. Do you know the name of the housekeeping staff person who routinely cleans your area?
12. Are there complimentary medical journals or specialty magazines in the employee lounge areas to encourage continuous learning? Do you subsidize subscriptions?
13. Do you hear positive comments about managers—or management overall—in reviews or casual conversation?
14. Does the private language and conversation of your facility refer to patients in a positive way?
15. Would your nurses consider their departments well staffed? Would your patients?
16. Do managers mentor and counsel other team members, even if they are not direct reports?
17. Does your leadership routinely celebrate individual or group accomplishments?
18. How do you protect employees who want to report a safety concern?
19. Are team members encouraged to share lessons from near misses, adverse events and failures?
20. Are doctors told when their patient develops an infection or returns to the hospital?

21. Are your infection rates, adverse events or safety numbers posted in a common area so that staff can readily see them and be encouraged to improve them?
22. Is the discharge planning and explanation process done as a team?
23. Do you incorporate patient safety and/or infection prevention into new employee orientation?
24. Do you consider environmental services an official part of your infection control department?
25. Do you provide infection control education and training for the maintenance and housekeeping department?
26. Is your organization a culturally diverse representation of your customer demographics?
27. How do you ensure cultural sensitivity and awareness for your staff?
28. Does your hospital have a Patient & Family Advisory Council? Is it made up of those who have had both positive and negative experiences in your facility?
29. How do you try to learn from those with less than positive experiences at your hospital?
30. How are ethics, integrity and transparency incorporated into your daily culture?
31. Do your employees leave on positive terms with strong relationships intact?
32. Is your employee retention rate something you're proud of?
33. Does your facility look and operate the same during a Joint Commission survey as it does the rest of the year? If not, why not?
34. Does your hospital's underlying culture believe "infections are unavoidable" or "things happen?"
35. Do your patient rooms promote patient safety and infection control? (*i.e.*, sink in the patient room, handrails, filled soap dispensers, stocked paper towels)
36. Does your facility use copper railings, silver-based antimicrobials, microfiber cleaning cloths and mops, HEPA multi-filtration vacuuming, etc.?
37. Do you bathe patients upon admission (especially from the ED) to reduce the amount of germs and bacteria they are introducing into the facility?
38. Are patients encouraged to brush their teeth daily and clean under their nails to reduce the collection of bacteria?
39. Is there a "whatever it takes" attitude within the company and throughout every level of the organization?
40. Do you have a strong idea of what your customers love about you and what they'd change if they could?
41. Do you share customer/patient feedback openly with your staff?
42. Do all members of the staff take ownership of customer problems?

"Culture does not change because we desire to change it. Culture changes when the organization is transformed; the culture reflects the realities of people working together every day."

— Frances Hesselbein