

Identifying employee stressors to effect positive culture change

Client: Seventy Five State Street
Solution provider: My InnerView
Location: Portland, Maine

Seventy Five State Street — a not-for-profit assisted living and independent living campus situated in the historic west end of Portland, Maine — has been providing care for elders since 1854. Comprised of three buildings connected by interior corridors, the campus has the feel of a small New England village, and comprises 87 assisted living and 65 independent living apartments. Seventy Five State Street is provided oversight by its volunteer Board of Trustees — a governing body composed of business executives, community leaders and Seventy Five State Street residents.

A decade ago, Seventy Five State Street established a quality improvement management team to create a continuous quality improvement agenda to effect culture change for employees and residents. “We’ve been working on this initiative for a long time,” comments Tony Forgione, CEO, Seventy Five State Street, “and had been conducting our own homegrown surveys. But those surveys only plotted our progress versus the previous year — that’s data in isolation.” For that reason, Seventy Five State Street began conducting My InnerView resident and employee satisfaction surveys.

“My InnerView’s national database is absolutely vital,” Forgione says. There’s not enough data out there for assisted living and independent living, and we felt compelled to see how we were doing compared to other facilities across the nation.”

Forgione notes, “Our results were outstanding. We had 98 percent overall resident satisfaction and 86 percent overall employee satisfaction — which is significantly above the national average — and 90 percent of our employees would recommend Seventy Five State Street for care. But there were a few areas where we were just hitting the averages or were slightly below. These were the areas we wanted to pinpoint to improve resident care and the professional culture.”

After reviewing My InnerView’s resident satisfaction survey data, Forgione discovered that while residents had “great relationships with staff, residents didn’t feel they were connecting with other residents.” The result? “Our quality management team created a new Resident Life Committee, composed of family members, employees, residents and board members, to come up with opportunities for residents to interact both formally and informally. This committee is very energized — the meetings themselves are great social opportunities — and they’ve energized this place.”

In just the past two years, the committee has developed *The Forum*, an entirely resident-driven and written magazine. “These planning and editing meetings have drawn together a whole different group of residents who feel very engaged,” Forgione added. “The committee is also exploring the idea of providing a shared resident vehicle. Our residents are very independent, and having their own car is very much a sign of independence to them. However, the majority of the cars aren’t used that often, so why not be green and share a vehicle?” They’re also considering the purchase a Wii system to incorporate into their fitness program and starting a bowling league.

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My InnerView's survey data also indicated an average score concerning resident spiritual opportunities. Aiming for excellence, Seventy Five State Street began holding remembrance services every six months for former residents. "At first, staff were a little apprehensive because they didn't know how residents would react," Forgione explained. "But the idea was driven by the committee — literally driven from within — and is very successful. The committee plans and runs the services and we have family members driving 500 miles to participate in their loved one's service. It's an example of resident autonomy that has helped residents and staff engage with one another and with the community."

As for the employees, My InnerView survey results indicated that employees truly felt management cares for them. But My InnerView data indicated that employees needed more assistance dealing with stress at home and work. Seventy Five State Street's management team and human resources director worked together to discover what those stressors were, and what they found was that employee concerns were economically driven — specifically the rising cost of fuel and the impending winter season. "My InnerView's survey helped us come up with the idea to provide a heating assistance program," said Forgione. "We have a very generous time off plan — four weeks — because we believe time off is important. We gave employees the option to sell some of that time, only allowing them to sell up to 50 percent of their time, in order to pay for heating fuel. The response has been very positive — our employees still get time off and they can also fill their oil tanks."

Forgione also points out that the My InnerView survey data assists leadership in pushing forward their quality agendas. "Data plays an important role in educating the board about how the system works. It's also much easier for me to go before the board and make requests when I have the My InnerView data to back me up. I was able to show the Board of Trustees and the management team that employees were financially stressed and convince them to support focus groups in order to solve the problem. When I needed the board to approve the increased cost of health insurance benefits, I was able to illustrate the financial strain felt by employees with My InnerView's data and make a strong case for picking up these costs."

Another important benefit of My InnerView's data is the extent to which it illuminates the efficacy or failure of strategic approaches. "My InnerView's data corroborated what we thought was working — lower wages in exchange for more comprehensive health insurance, four weeks of paid time off and flex scheduling. Instead of just thinking this system worked, we had the data — based on employee responses — to indicate that indeed it was. We also discovered that our 15 percent employee turnover is significantly lower than the 50 percent national average, so we know what we're doing is working," Forgione concludes. "It confirms that the culture change we've been working on for a decade, when employee turnover was originally 96 percent, is a success. Having data on hand that shows you your successes and weaknesses is critical. My InnerView's tools helped us identify opportunities and confirmed our quality improvement direction."



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