Creating a Culture of Workforce Engagement in EMS

With the extreme shortages of EMS personnel in many parts of the country, EMS agencies are doubling their efforts to retain their workforce. Agencies can help strengthen their ability to retain their personnel by developing a Culture of Workforce Engagement.

What is a Culture of Workforce Engagement?
It is an organizational practice to create an environment of norms and behaviors defined by meaningful work, deep employee involvement and connection, and job and organizational cohesiveness, with the goal of encouraging and supporting a high level of employee commitment, passion, and loyalty through strong organizational leadership.

Why Is It Important?
Engagement of the workforce is a critical driver of organizational success. Engagement strengthens the mental and emotional connection of team members towards their workplace. According to Gallup:

- 33% of American workers are engaged in their jobs
- 53% say they’re “just showing up”
- 17% describe themselves as “actively disengaged”

Note: Percentages may have been rounded up causing the total percentage to be more than 100%.

Team members want to feel valued and respected in today’s workplace; they want their work to be meaningful and have their ideas heard. Highly engaged team members are more productive and committed to the organizations in which they work.

What Are the Benefits to an EMS agency?
The driving benefit of creating a Culture of Workforce Engagement for EMS agencies is retention of EMS practitioners. Workforce engagement improves performance, productivity, employee morale, recruitment and retention, quality of work, and reduces employee-related problems. According to the American Ambulance Association’s (AAA) Newton 360 Ambulance Industry Employee Turnover Study, voluntary turnover remains in the 20-30% range annually for EMS, while 32% of EMS practitioners leave within the first year. The study highlighted the cost to replace an employee, including the cost to attract, screen, hire, onboard and train a new employee. Onboarding a new EMT averages about $6,780, while replacing a full-time paramedic can cost about $9,113. Retention equals revenue.

Cost-Effective and Simple Ways to Create a Culture of Workforce Engagement in Your EMS Agency:

- Take time to get to know your team members personally, celebrate and grieve during personal moments of significance, and recognize their accomplishments.
- Support work-life balance. Encourage extracurricular activities and scheduling for school, family and personal needs.
- Communicate often, both informally and formally with your workforce.
- Schedule Structured Rounding, a concept adopted by hospital leadership to schedule time for management to engage their departments, supervisors, team members and support services on a regular basis.
- Pair leaders, emerging leaders, and team members in mentor partnerships.
- Provide opportunities for leadership training or other career-enhancing education.
- Create workplace committees that include field practitioners. Consider designing some to be employee-led and adopt outcomes or goals from these committees.
- Create a process for empowering team members through autonomous decision-making within their scope of position.
- Be encouraging of and willing to discuss differing viewpoints and decisions.
- Conduct annual employee engagement surveys and share results with your workforce.
- Conduct Stay Interviews & Exit Interviews.
- Create a shared mission, vision, and strategic plan based off your team members’ input (surveys and interviews) that embraces diversity, equity, and inclusion.

References:
Lawrence, R. (2021, July 22). Turnover: We have measured it, but can we manage it? EMS1. Retrieved November 14, 2022, from https://www.ems1.com/recruitment-and-retention/articles/turnover-we-have-measured-it-but-can-we-manage-it-

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