



Patrice Putman

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Treating hospital patients requires an ability to make multiple decisions in a short time frame, so communication among healthcare workers is vital. An open environment for voicing opinions and resolving disputes is critical to keep worker focus on patient care.

Yet when Patrice Putman completed MaineGeneral's first-ever employee satisfaction survey in 2003, the results showed that communication was a weak area within the organization. Staff members said emphatically that the culture of MaineGeneral did not address conflict effectively, and employees did not always feel comfortable expressing their opinions.

A simple solution would have been to hire a high-priced trainer and gather disaffected staff in a room to listen to a lecture or participate in role-playing exercises. But Putman, MaineGeneral's director of employee development, chose a different route. Recognizing that employee satisfaction is key to patient satisfaction—any healthcare system's ultimate goal—she convinced company leadership to support an intensive training initiative with both their presence and organizational resources.

Whereas most people might have gone straight to management and leadership development, Putman felt strongly that the company's front-line workers needed attention. She and her staff experimented with various offerings in such areas as active listening, assertiveness, time management, and general workplace strategies.

"I listened to people who had been around for a long time. They told me that the general employee population had not been getting many educational opportunities," she says.

Putman relishes a challenge. That's why, she says, she finds training and development such a satisfying career. When she took the helm of the employee development operation, she found a department that was more like a ghost town. Two of its four employees had left, and offerings were sparse. Clearly, Putman had her work cut out for her.

During her tenure, Putman built the training and development unit

into something that all employees want to take part in. Now, more than half of MaineGeneral's 3,500 employees voluntarily participate in more than 20 nonclinical professional development programs offered each year. The organization also offers a certificate in professional development, a certificate in service, an advanced professional development program, a leadership development program, emotional intelligence training, and a two-day coaching class.

"Coaching is a critical aspect of our success," she says. "As we concentrate on gaining results in cultural change, coaching is the best way to support our managers in pursuit of those results."

As a relative newcomer to the field, having held her current position only since 2002, she brings a fresh perspective. But she says that her broad educational and career background prepared her for her current role. Putman holds degrees in nursing and in law. She worked as a nurse and a transportation lawyer before marketing for a healthcare network that merged with MaineGeneral.

"This is a great job for someone who thrives on change," she says. "I've found training and development to be a very vibrant, changing career. I have to keep current on changes throughout the organization so that my department can respond."

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