

How to Harvest and Standardize Best Practices

Harvesting best practices is necessary, and the same harvesting procedure that works in one place will probably work in another. When a leader starts getting or gets and sustains solid results, take time to assess exactly what his or her best practice is and follow the steps necessary for spreading it throughout the organization. Here's how:

- 1) **Diagnose** what is being done. Carefully research any change in processes, tools, techniques, and, just as importantly, leader behavior.
- 2) Take time to **document the findings**.
- 3) **Create a best practice transfer manual** that outlines outcomes and processes and provides a list of possible questions and answers. The manual will help ease pushback because it will make implementing the best practice easier for everyone involved. In the manual, **spell out the steps** for successfully implementing the best practice to help avoid overwhelming employees with the new way of doing things, which often leads to transfer failure.
- 4) **Assess the skills needed** to implement the best practice. The person who created or originally implemented the best practice may have some skills that others do not. Assess what skills are needed in order for other organization leaders to implement the practice successfully. Can the best practice still be implemented if the leader in place does not have the skills? Decide whether his department should just keep going as usual and not implement the new best practice, or go to step five.
- 5) **Get training in place for leaders**. Training the leaders who will be teaching others how to implement the best practice is crucial. Don't unleash leaders to start teaching their employees until they all know exactly what they should be doing.
- 6) **Establish a plan for those who lack the will or the skill**. A leader might have the skill to implement a best practice but not the will, or vice versa. Without one or the other, there will be problems implementing the best practice. When a leader lacks one or the other, ask if he can acquire the other element, how fast it can be done, and at what cost. Then decide if the time and cost are worth the effort. If it's not, then it might be time to remove or demote that leader.
- 7) **Identify the why and keep in front of the organization**. When changes are made, it's for a reason. It's imperative that employees know the why behind the implementation of the best practice. Is it to improve care and save more lives, to provide better access, or to lower expenses? In health care, the "why" drives the "what," so make sure the why is clear to everyone.

- 8) **Hold people accountable for results.** The best practice is meant to improve performance. If desired outcomes aren't produced from leaders and their employees, then hold those individuals accountable. If their mediocre results slide, the best practice is considered optional and will not likely be optimized.
- 9) **Put in validation systems.** Tools that validate implementation are critical to measure implementation. Without them, all of the performance improvement techniques in the validation process are missed. Validation also provides the consistency needed to get the desired outcome. So trust but verify.
- 10) **Recognize the departments that are doing well in implementation.** When the other departments see that the new behavior is being recognized and commended, they will move to that behavior. Use meetings, e-mails, letters, and other avenues to spotlight those departments or individuals who are doing a great job with the new best practice or to announce when milestones are reached. Remember to recognize early and often.
- 11) **Standardize the steps.** Make sure everyone in the organization becomes very familiar with the steps in order to standardize the best practice. Make those steps consistent. It will be much easier to implement future best practices successfully.
- 12) **Keep searching.** There is no shortage of better ways to do things in health care, nor is there a lack of desire to share. Never stop searching for the next great way to do something.
- 13) **Don't get too hung up on best.** If something is better than what is currently taking place, then go for better. There is always time to worry about best after better.