

CASE STUDY

# In pursuit of excellence: How one large regional hospital used Workforce Engagement surveys to improve employee engagement by 5%

OUR WORK WITH

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Mary Greeley Medical Center

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## Opportunity

In 2018, Mary Greeley Medical Center (MGMC), a 220-bed regional hospital in Ames, Iowa, became the first Iowa organization ever to receive a Best Practice recognition from the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award program. It's a singular honor from the country's foremost authority on organizational excellence.

MGMC's leadership could be forgiven for resting on their laurels. But the special recognition only stoked their ambitions. It presented a quandary for MGMC: How could they improve upon an organization that, evidently, was already performing so well?

Leadership recognized that the best path to optimal performance was through a **concerted effort to maximize employee engagement.**

For this, they turned to NRC Health.

## Solution

NRC Health's Workforce Engagement solution is a comprehensive program of employee intelligence. Designed to capture a complete and candid picture of workplace morale, Workforce Engagement instruments focus on the dimensions of working life that matter most to employees. Two exploratory axes—Quality of Leadership and Quality of Workplace—have consistently shown robust predictive power in crucial measures like employee attrition and customer satisfaction.

*Quality of Leadership* questions center around an organization's mission, and its employees' confidence in their leaders to execute that mission. They also probe how employees react to feedback they receive, as well as the personal investment they feel from individual leaders.

*Quality of Workplace* questions, meanwhile, evaluate the working environment as a whole. These questions evaluate whether employees enjoy a sense of alignment with the company culture, whether they have connections with their coworkers, and whether they believe their jobs give them enough opportunities for growth.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A 220-bed regional hospital in Ames, Iowa, became the first Iowa organization ever to receive special recognition from the Malcolm Baldrige Quality Program. By using NRC Health's workforce engagement tools they were able to decrease attrition, increase patient experience scores, and reconnect their people to their organizational values and to each other.



### MARY GREELEY MEDICAL CENTER

- 1,300 employees
- 153 Physicians on medical staff with 32 specialties
- 500 volunteers
- 220 licensed beds
- 28,000+ emergency room visits
- Located in Ames, IA

# Implementation

For the most part, MGMC's leaders were gratified to see positive results from their Workforce Engagement surveys. Employees generally felt an authentic attachment to their work, to the organization, and to each other.

However, the surveys did reveal one opportunity for improvement: communication. Some employees reported trouble grasping broader organizational directives, or didn't sense a personal investment from leadership. To rectify that, MGMC's team initiated an ambitious program of employee connection.

Executive leadership now hosts quarterly Town Hall meetings to help employees stay connected to organizational activities, ask questions, and give them a chance to relate their perspectives on MGMC. Brian Dieter, MGMC's CEO, took this a step further when after the annual engagement survey he formed small focus groups of MGMC employees. Within the span of two months, he managed to personally speak with over **10% of MGMC's staff**.

The meetings with employees were fruitful. Their feedback informed a series of strategic initiatives, all centered around improving employee engagement:

## AN INTERNAL SOCIAL-MEDIA NETWORK

First, a new digital tool. MGMC deployed an internal social-media network—furnished by Facebook—to give employees a space to praise each other. Comments and likes streamed in, and unmistakably bolstered morale.

Mary Greeley also created "Department Spotlight" videos that are accessible to both patients and staff. These three-minute productions showcased every sector of the hospital's operations. The idea not only gave behind-the-scenes departments a boost, but also knit the staff that much closer together. These videos have been so popular that MGMC's plan is now to create a Department Spotlight video for every department.

## GOAL CASCADING

A sure way to alienate employees is to obscure the connection between their work and the organization's mission. To make sure that didn't happen at MGMC, leaders wanted to draw a clear line from the corporate strategy to the individual's tasks—leading to the process of "cascading."

Cascading starts by educating employees about larger strategic goals. Then, crucially, it gives employees the chance to contribute. Instead of mandating goals from the top down, it lets employees devise their own personal work goals to fit in with the strategic vision. All employees have individual goal cards, on which they identify goals that tie their work to MGMC's strategic "Big Dot" organizational goals. (An example of this is dietary technicians resolving to check that bed alarms are on when they deliver meals, in order to help reduce preventable harm.) This kind of goal-setting engenders a sense of ownership and commitment among employees, and makes them feel more connected to their organization.

"The data we had from NRC Health's Workforce Engagement tool enabled us to know where to start when having discussions in our focus groups. The focus groups were instrumental, because they really helped us zero in on what the action plans should be. They reconnected people with Mary Greeley's values and with each other."

—Penny Bellville, SPHR, CCP, SHRM-SCP,  
Director, Human Resources/Education, MGMC

# 130+

employees in focus groups met personally with CEO in just two months for engagement improvement

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### LEARN MORE

For more on workforce engagement solutions from NRC Health, call 800.388.4264 or visit [nrchealth.com/demo](http://nrchealth.com/demo).

## CHARTING YOUR COURSE

Finally, recognizing that a team is only as effective as its leaders, MGMC expended considerable resources developing a new training program for its managerial staff. The program, entitled Charting Your Course, operates on three fronts.

First comes a three-day-long onboarding program for new managers, where they learn the practical skills related to leadership, along with the “softer” lessons of how to fit in with MGMC culture.

Then leaders have the chance to polish their abilities during monthly Leader Skills days. These meetings offer regular refreshers on the foundation they’ve built in their training.

To keep leaders inspired, MGMC also hosts a quarterly retreat for its leaders. Taking a full day off-site to reflect on their purpose and their work together gives the organization’s leaders a chance to return to campus inspired. It’s indispensable for leaders’ enthusiasm—which, of course, is contagious among the rest of the staff.

### Results

The results from MGMC’s initiatives have been striking.

#### Employees reported improvements in both communication and the overall work environment:

- The percentage of employees reporting that “communication is not a problem” went from **43.7% to 47.8%**.
- More importantly, employees felt heard. The percentage of employees who believed that MGMC “took action based on last year’s employee surveys” went from **36.1% in 2017 to 56.8% in 2019**.
- The percentage of employees reporting that MGMC is a “great place to work” went from **43.1% to 48.1%**.
- Year-over-year employee attrition **declined by 1.5%**.

#### Even patients noticed the improvement among MGMC’s employees:

- The percentage of patients reporting that “clinical/nursing staff communicates very well” went from **27% to 30.1%**.
- The percentage of patients reporting that they fully understand all aspects of their care went from **40.8% to 48%**.
- Best of all, reports of MGMC as a “great place to receive care” went from **49.9% to 57%**. This contributed to an over **\$350,000 increase in MGMC’s HCAHPS reimbursement**.

# 5%

increase in employee recommendation for MGMC as a “great place to work”

# 1.5%

decline in year-over-year employee attrition

# \$350k

increase in HCAHPS reimbursement

#### FORWARD

Clearly, the mechanisms for improvement are already in place at MGMC. Now it’s just time for them to add a little polish. Next year they’ll be formalizing what they’ve achieved. The goal is to secure staff-wide buy-in for the drive to make MGMC better. Leadership is confident they’ll succeed.