



Health and Recovery Services Administration

Addressing Employee Concerns



Thank you for your input. We are committed; we are concerned.

Thank you for participating in last fall's DSHS Employee Satisfaction Survey. The results have been posted on iHRSA now for several months, and we encourage you to take a look at them. We also conducted a series of focus groups in March, and directors have been engaged with their divisions – discussing the results and what they mean.

As always, there is good news and bad news about the workplace in the 2009 survey. But it would be disingenuous to argue that all is well and normal. These are not normal times. We are well into a second year of continuous budget crisis. Revenue projections began falling in 2008, and they have continued to fall ever since. At our current strength, we have lost approximately one in 10 employees who were here in Cherry Street Plaza and Town Square a year ago. Uncertainty in the workplace increases stress, and fewer people – no matter how often we repeat “doing less with less” – mean more work and sometimes different work for those who remain. Those factors certainly lower morale, increase pressure, encourage burnout, and contribute to a difficult workplace.

EC has identified five concerns that stood out in both the survey and our focus groups:

1. Stress – many factors contribute, including overwork, uncertainty about future, lack of resources.
2. Employees want respect and attention from supervisors, and they don't always get it.
3. One personal concern cuts across everything: Workers are worried about keeping their jobs.
4. Some employees perceive there is a lack of recognition here for jobs done well.
5. Many staff feel that some executives avoid contact and communication with them.



Here, in a new action plan for 2010, the Executive Committee has outlined some ideas to address these issues for the coming year. This year, directors have also proposed individual strategies pegged to specific divisions. That does not mean that a good idea in one division is a bad idea in another. As always, we want people to be creative and flexible – and we urge managers to borrow good ideas wherever they find them. We look forward to your continuing feedback as the year goes on. Please let our Communications Director, Jim Stevenson, know how you feel about the survey and this action plan.

-- Doug Porter, Assistant Secretary, HRSA

-- Heidi Robbins Brown, Deputy Assistant Secretary, HRSA

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Overall Focus Issues: Setting goals, being realistic



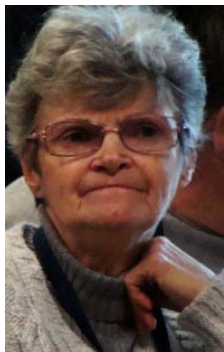
Dealing with an era of shortages

In an era of shortage, HRSA employees need to adapt to a different set of circumstances, and supervisors and managers must articulate the strategies that will help. A bright, talented, energetic staff like HRSA's does not wait to set new goals every year – it strives to constantly improve and set higher standards. We need to convey the difficult message that burnout and overwork are the likely result of being unrealistic about the challenges we can accept. If we do it right, it will help staff accept realistic expectations and continue to push for quality while resisting the pressure of quantity. If we do it wrong, these factors have the potential to further hurt morale and vacuum off the energy that has been the hallmark of HRSA.



One size doesn't fit all

Each division should assess and approach its employees' needs. Some of the big issues in one division may be quite small concerns in another. In the past, HRSA's approach to the survey action plan has been to adopt an overall plan for the administration. This time, we need to target more precisely.



Strategies for Cherry Street Plaza, Town Square and DDDS (*)

- Staff continue to feel that the communication back up the chain is weaker than it is top-down. Supervisors should be scrupulous about making sure employee concerns are sent back up the chain of command. **Senior Leadership**
- We will put a priority on leadership involvement in events and activities throughout the organization, including division all-staff meetings, to bring top leadership into contact with line staff and to solicit feedback and ideas. **Division directors.**
- We will explore a weekly or biweekly communication from the Assistant Secretary and the Deputy Assistant Secretary to help resolve questions and rumors – especially with a new reorganization on the horizon. **Doug Porter, Heidi Robbins Brown**
- We will work to Improve structure of iHRSA Internet and Intranet for interactive staff communications, including feedback opportunities for line staff and leadership. **Rich Campbell, Jim Stevenson**
- We will put a priority on training opportunities as an investment in staff, even when budgets are tight. **Executive Committee**

(*) NOTE: Action plans for the three state psychiatric hospitals and the Special Commitment Center are prepared separately.



Division Focus Issues: Meeting concerns head-on



Division of Healthcare Services

We are going to take an office approach rather than a division approach so each office can work on issues specific to that office.

- Each month, the Director facilitates an “All-Division Staff Meeting” in order to provide business updates, encourage a two-way communication process and conduct employee recognition activities. The Director also encourages staff within the division to communicate any and all concerns directly and maintains an “open-door” policy. This “open-door” policy has also been adopted by Office Chiefs and is intended to help facilitate a “bottom-up” rather than “top-down” communication process.
- One office is identifying ways to improve recognition-by designing more spontaneous events, post notes of recognition and thank you’s around the office, creating a “cause for applause” type approach.
- In addition, each office has developed its own approach to improve recognition activities. The Office of Community Services has spontaneous employee recognition events such as “post-note thank you’s” and “Cause for Applause,” as well as monthly birthday celebrations for staff.
- Another office is responding to feedback on opportunities to learn and grow by looking at rotations, inviting staff who have an interest in a issue and want to learn about it even though it may not be a part of their regular job responsibilities. We need to make it easier to participate in workgroups and other learning opportunities around those issues.



Division of Systems and Monitoring

DSM will be focusing on recognition and communication improvements.

- Recognition is especially problematic due to the restrictions on activities, but our recognition committee will be working to provide more frequent opportunities and activities that focus on peer-to-peer interactions (e.g., encouragement of a “Cause for Applause” or similar approach).
- We will also be providing better access to executive management from our division at smaller office level meetings and encourage the use of other executives to include the Assistant Secretary and the Deputy Assistant Secretary, as well as other division directors, to speak to specific subjects.





Division Focus Issues: Meeting concerns head-on



Division of Legal Services

Office of Hearings and Appeals (OHA):

- **Working relationships:** Office Chief also works to improve working relationships and improve the recognition of OHA legal expertise and our judgments on the legal issues in the hearing process.
- **Improved communication:** Whenever possible, the Office Chief attempts to fully and honestly communicate necessary information from OHA staff to management in a timely and accurate manner about work issues and concerns. In similar fashion, the Office Chief is working to provide timely and accurate work information from higher management to the OHA staff.

Contracts Office:

- **Opportunities to learn and grow:** Contracts has been working on more cross-training opportunities and will have a plan in place to give each staff an opportunity to review a contract from another area and report out to the group. This is an effort to learn from each other about our contracts and the concepts that are important. Staff has also been allowed to do contract work for areas they normally do not handle.
- **Performance Evaluation:** Contracts staff continue to strive for timely evaluation processes that allow enough time for both the supervisor and the employee to have meaningful conversations prior to finalization of the evaluation. They continue to point out that the evaluation process is a two-way process and that the employee also needs to take responsibility for the meaningfulness of the evaluation.



Division of Rates and Finance

- **Timely and Meaningful Performance Development Plan** – This item will be in each of the Office Chiefs' PDP, and they will have the same item in their Unit Managers' PDPs. We will send out monthly PDP reminders and track how we are doing. We will also hold training sessions on preparing them – sharing best practices and ideas, and identifying the qualities we would want in certain job classifications.
- **Opportunities to Learn and Grow** – We're exploring a Peer to Peer Training as a way to provide opportunities for staffs to learn and grow. It will start as a pilot program so we can tweak it before offering it to everyone within the division.
- **Recognition for a Job Well Done** – This will also reflect in everyone's PDP. Managers are to think of opportunities to provide meaningful, timely and day-to-day recognition as well as the annual division recognition event. Director will drop in to the unit/section staff meetings, and managers will keep Director informed of success stories so she can recognize staffs and also share their successes with the Assistant Secretary and Deputy Assistant Secretary.



Division Focus Issues: Meeting concerns head-on



Division of Eligibility and Service Delivery

Stress:

- Be aware of stress (personal and professional) and acknowledge it.
- Key message: We are not asking you to do more – we are asking you to meet your expectations and that is the standard we will all be held accountable to,
- Send out e-mails to thank and recognize positive events in the division. Track staff birthdays and other milestone events (on-going in each DESD office).
- Weekly e-mails updating the staff on the week (MEDS currently does this).
- Daily Brief Huddles with Staff and their supervisor (happens today in MACSC, MEDS and ASO).
- Newsletters for MACSC and Authorization to recognize staff, provide updates, upcoming events.

Recognition

- Balancing Act – recognizing a good job and knowing which staff thrives on it and the others who do not – respecting staff by not forcing a cookie-cutter approach to recognition in the workplace.
- Supervisors engaging their staff with Unit Huddles (happens to day at MEDS).
- Bucket list – Supervisors asking a variety of questions of their staff to determine how they would like to be recognized (ASO).
- Some certificates for silly things -- not always for a job well done, but for fun ideas (OMMEP – Buy-In).

Communication

- Improve opportunities for staff to communicate with Assistant Secretary and Deputy Assistant Secretary
- Keep communications simple and plain-talked.
- Keep lines open – Office Chiefs and Director attend all staff and unit meetings (this is currently being done in each office and by the division Director).

Lack of Recognition

- Interviewing class – present interview training that was developed and successfully completed earlier this year (2010) to provide opportunities for staff development and skill building to help them in the future.
- Developmental job opportunities within the division -- if possible, free staff to work in another office, to learn more about ProviderOne or even cross training within their own offices (ASO & OMMEP do this today).



Division Focus Issues: Meeting concerns head-on



Division of Disability Determination Services

- The Division of Disability Determination Services was pleased with the overall responses from DDS staff regarding job satisfaction. The DDDS management team is developing strategies to increase employees' involvement in these areas.
- **Customer Feedback (36%)** -- DDS will devise a method for getting customer feedback to improve our work processes.
- **Innovation in work processes (46%)** -- DDS will encourage staff to come up with new and better ways of doing their work.
- **Communications on budget and agency changes (57%)** -- DDS management will increase our communications about budget reductions and agency changes.
- **Health and wellness (57%)** -- DDS management will play a more active role in promoting the health and wellness of our employees.
- **Staff input on decisions affecting their work (57%)** -- DDS management will increase DDS staff involvement in SSA workgroups affecting DDS business processes.
- **Washington DDS will work with the Social Security Administration** to increase opportunities for DDS staff members to affect SSA policies and procedures that govern the work done by DDS employees.



Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery

- The survey results will be shared with all DBHR staff by May 15, 2010.
- Each Office will provide opportunities for Office staff to discuss the survey results and to develop strategies to address the opportunities for improvement identified in the survey by June 30, 2010.
- Recommended strategies will be discussed at the July Open Management Meeting.
- DBHR Management Team will determine the final strategies and work with all interested DBHR staff to develop an action, to be implemented no later than August 31, 2010.

