Executive Summary: Improving employee engagement has the power to influence positive results not only in quality but also patient satisfaction. In 2012, Ochsner Health Systems embarked on a plan to improve communication with its employees and achieve an increase in employee engagement scores. Through this commitment the organization has seen a significant rise in engagement scores for attendees of their live employee experience events.
The Power of ONE

Introduction: In 2012, Ochsner Health System developed an engagement plan called the Power of ONE that addressed how they communicated with their employees. The strategy involved a wave of initiatives to help communicate with employees a vision for the future and strategies for success (Figure 1). First, Ochsner changed delivering a daily executive message to weekly submitting these messages. Second, departments would display “Power Centers” in every department within each of its facilities. This board was to communicate system-wide updates and quality reports. Also, customer satisfaction results as well as highlighting outstanding employee contributions were displayed. Responsibility of the “Power Centers” resided with department managers. Third, the executive team would hold a monthly Power of the System Web Ex designed for system updates and Q&A sessions open to any employee. Finally, hold live events to engage a broader audience simultaneously with this Ochsner created three events: System Leadership; The Power of the Practice and the Power of ONE Employee Experience.

Objective: In its simplest form, sustained employee engagement leads to staff satisfaction and studies have shown a positive correlation between staff satisfaction and customer satisfaction and increased productivity (Global Workforce Study, 2012):

Employee engagement → Employee satisfaction → Patient satisfaction

As described by Hesket et al, this relationship between the employee and outcomes, known as the Service Profit Chain, attributes value experienced by the customer is created by happy employees (Haskett, Jones, Loveman, Sasser, & Schlesinger, 1994). With a change to the reimbursement models within healthcare and an emphasis on measures that indicate quality and superior outcomes with value-based purchasing, hospitals rely on an engaged and motivated workforce to deliver on those measures that impact the patient’s experience of care. The experience of care, as mentioned in the Institute of Health Improvement’s Triple Aim strategy on improving population health, is measurable through satisfaction surveys submitted by a patient that focuses on care that is timely, efficient, and patient-centered (Stiefel M, 2012). It has been shown that higher engagement leads to fewer turnovers; therefore, a reduction in the costs of new hires (Waldman, Kelly, Arora, & Smith, 2004). Higher turnover has significant implications to not only costs, but also to the dynamics of the patient care teams which impact quality and safety. Given the reduction of reimbursement payments provided by both Medicare and Medicaid, organizations face tough decisions in regards to the impact employee engagement programs have on their bottom line and their sustainability over time. In fact, it has been shown that companies with lower engagement scores experienced a lower profit margin (Schwartz, 2012).
**Background:** Two years ago an engagement survey was distributed to all of Ochsner’s employees. The results from the survey showed employees in the higher pay bands felt “more engaged” than those in the lower pay bands. A graphical display showed a dramatic drop in these engagements scores, which led to a concern for the organization’s top leaders. It appeared these results speak to an organization that is top-down in its approach and a connection or emotional bond was lacking in regard to its direct-line employees. It is that bonding or sense of involvement discussed by Maslow that drives an individual’s desire (Maslow, 1943). Warner Thomas, CEO Ochsner Health System and Jennifer Bollinger, Corporate Communications, decided to improve the engagement results by rolling out a new communication and engagement strategy. The bottom line message became organizational success was because of individual success. Details of the campaign are discussed below.

**The Power of ONE Employee Experience:** Targets employees across all pay bands but focuses on a higher concentration of front line employees. This event aims to touch the heart of the employees and energize the group in tangible ways. This 4 hour event brings together employees from its existing 8 hospitals and 35 clinics within the Ochsner System. By holding it quarterly, hospital leaders can select a portion of its employees to attend without significantly impacting patient care. The goal is to reach each employee annually. In a coordinated fashion employees are provided the Ochsner vision and strategy; updated information on employee tools or shared sites to offer and receive feedback; shared success stories on how they have impacted lives all while treating the audience to uplifting music; Zumba dancing and hilarious “blooper” moments of the leadership and medical staff in developing footage for Ochsner events. A single Power of ONE event typically reaches 2500 employees. For employees, it is a paid day with lunch and T-shirts provided (see Figure 2). It provides the employee visibility and access to top leaders within the system in a casual comfortable environment. The event’s priority is to make a connection by touching the heart of the employees.

**The Power of the Practice:** This quarterly event brings together physicians and advanced practice clinicians (Nurse Practitioners, Physician Assistants) within the system. The agenda focuses on the quality of the care provided by the network, which includes a discussion of best practices and the way ahead on developments that influence the care within its region and the potential relationships it is pursuing. This event truly targets the minds of its employees and tones down the exciting music, dancing and energy seen with the Power of ONE Employee Experience.

**System Leadership:** This quarterly event allows System Leadership to engage employees who hold higher levels of responsibilities from directors to supervisors. The intent is to share the vision of where the system is going but also to allow them to communicate these stories and share a common system mission to their direct reports. The agenda also addresses best practices seen within the system and the power of Lean thinking that has become part of the culture within this organization.
**State of the System WebEx:** Monthly meetings that provided supervisors and above update on how the system is performing and any good news stories to share via an access a link to a live audio and video feed. These meetings deliver concise information while encouraging discussion with the CEO, COO and Medical Director of the Health System. The times are posted well in advance and communicated with all Outlook calendars of its employees and typically occur at lunch time to help maximize participation.

**Replication within the Military Health System:** Army Medicine has implemented a change in how it checks the pulse of their employees. Previously, employees were given a Command Climate survey that sought feedback. Currently, employees are provided an annual survey called MEDCOM Speaks! (Dunbar, 2012). When comparing Ochsner to Army Medicine, a more appropriate comparison group would be to compare a regional medical command to the size of the Ochsner Health System. Ochsner currently has 8 hospitals and 35 clinics geographically spread within southeast Louisiana. Events are rotated to different locations to maximize attendance and to address the transportation challenges of employees traveling from more rural locations. Within Army Medicine Regional Command, transporting employees to these events would be both logistically and financially challenging. In spirit, a more manageable event would occur at the military treatment facility (MTF) level. Speaking as a military provider, there is a profound satisfaction of taking care of the nation’s military members and their families. From a sense of belonging, there should be a consistency of effort taken by Army Medicine to communicate the engagement strategy and provide visibility of its efforts and results. Given the Army’s budgetary constraints it appears a unified event of the magnitude seen at Ochsner would be a challenge to justify. A quick win opportunity would be for Army Medicine or the Regional Medical Commands to consistently broadcast a webinar event that highlights accomplishments and be accessible to lower echelon employees in addition to hospital administrators.

**Implementation Methods:** The Employee Experience has rotated to multiple sites since its inception. A majority of the hospitals are located near or around the New Orleans metro area and to hold an event of this magnitude takes planning, logistical support and money. A significant amount of the costs are seen in audio-visual set up, facility rental, and transportation. Incurred costs felt at the facility are likely in the area of provider productivity and potential nursing backfill actions in order to maximize event attendance.

**Results and monitor of its success:** Jennifer and her team constantly review statistics from this initiative. Reports provided to her team include: (1) the number of people who click on the email; (2) visits the weekly email message from the CEO; (3) number of visits to the “Power of the Practice website; (4) review of internal communication surveys; (5) and finally the review of the employee engagement surveys seen below.

**Participation** – 91% of employees who attended a Power of ONE Employee Experience completed the engagement survey compared to 61% for those who did not attend
Actively Engaged – 37% of employees who attended a Power of ONE Employee Experience were “Actively Engaged” compared to 29% for those who did not attend. This is a 27% difference in results and an opportunity to help maximize attendance.

Conclusion: In 2012, Ochsner reached a strategic inflection point and committed to making an investment in employee engagement and its communication strategy. At 32% actively engaged, Ochsner results are higher than the normal rate of 30% seen nationally with Best Practices seen at 38%. Those who attend a Power of ONE employee experience event markedly increased the active engagement score and thus demonstrate the effectiveness of the campaign. Ochsner’s integrated employee engagement programs are extensive and well-crafted. The level of engagement is impressive and they tailor the approach based on the target audiences. These events also remove those barriers that companies could face between the top leaders and lower-echelon employees. During these events CEO, Warner Thomas most certainly embraces the role of Chief Energy Officer as discussed in Harvard Business Review (Figure 3). It is this influential energy that has been described as contagious and necessary to create sustainable results in employee engagement (Schwartz, 2012). The focus of this paper was to address the Power of One initiative and to discuss changes in communication and engagement strategies implemented by one organization.

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References

Dunbar, V. (2012, 28-September). *MEDCOM Speaks! Survey Results --The Next Step*. From Army.Mil:
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*Global Workforce Study*. (2012). From Towers Watson:


Attachments

Figure 1: List of Ochsner Engagement Initiatives

Figure 2: Engaged Employee with Ochsner mascot "Ollie"
Figure 3: Warner Thomas, CEO Ochsner Health System