

## ***How to Win Friends and Influence People:*** **Senior Leader Rounding**

It's a significant investment in time that produces great rewards. That's how the senior leadership team at Monongahela Valley Hospital feels about rounding. Eight senior leaders have made it a priority, and unfailingly devote the necessary hours each month to fulfill their commitment.

Vice President of Administration and Support Services Ray Andrews is one of this group. He explained that upon commencing Mon Valley's Journey to Excellence, senior leaders heeded the advice of Baptist Leadership Group's consultants who stressed the need to be visible. Executives divided up the organization into eight sections: in the hospital, seventh and sixth floors, fifth and fourth, third and second, with the first and ground floors being stand-alone areas. Senior leaders also round in other on and off campus buildings which include the Sweeney-Melenzyer Pavilion building, the MPOB (multipurpose office building), and finally, off campus entities which make up the eighth piece of the rotation. One senior leader rounds in each section every month (and in their own departments weekly). Even on Saturday, the on-call administrator comes in for a half day to be visible throughout the hospital departments.

Each month the leaders rotate to round in a different section than the month before. Varying the rotation gives employees the opportunity to approach an alternative leader if there is a concern or situation to discuss.

### **Purposeful Conversations**

Each department to be rounded on is given prior notification by the leader, who communicates that he or she will be there simply to talk to available staff. As he rounds, Andrews looks for things germane to his personal job responsibilities. He also concentrates on one theme everywhere he goes, sharing the same stories and information or asking the same set of questions. For example, following a recent employee forum, his queries centered on whether or not the staff member attended the event, what was valuable to that person, and what was the overall feeling of the CEO's message. If the employee did not attend, Andrews asked why and then continued the conversation based on the answers he received.

Besides the process of communication, each leader is listening for a tone in the work environment and watching for indications of how the journey is proceeding. Reward and recognition opportunities are taken advantage of, whether it is a compass award (employee-to-employee thank you), an acknowledgement of a staff member going above and beyond, or a written note of appreciation.

## **Consistency is Key**

Andrews says that when the senior leaders first began rounding, they faced significant push back. All the conversations were about problems and the need for improvement – which were not always shared in the nicest way. Initially, too, many staff members were nervous, difficult to engage in conversation, and determined to hold executives at arm’s length. The prevailing opinion seemed to be that leadership was there to find something wrong; employees would say, “Am I going to get in trouble?”



But over time with the frequency of consistent rounding, the reactions changed. The leaders made sure they acted on the issues brought before them; and if it wasn’t fixable, staff was told why. The reception became warmer as genuine relationships were established between leadership and employees. As a result, the trust quotient also greatly improved. (In the original employee culture audit, as the organization

began its journey, one of the lowest scoring items was trust in senior leadership.) Executives found that employees began to openly approach them, saw the attitude change to one of “they’re here because they want to know our concerns and share information.” Additionally, the senior leaders also have benefited from getting to know staff better, opening the lines of communication, and developing respect and trust based on improving all aspects of relationships.

## **Best Practice Outcome**

Besides the relationship building and trust that the executive group has forged due to their efforts, an even more significant outcome has been the rise in patient satisfaction scores: from the 17<sup>th</sup> percentile when Mon Valley began their journey in 2006 to the 84<sup>th</sup> percentile currently. The change was something that couldn’t have taken place without staff’s commitment to improve the patient’s experience, and leadership rounding served as a motivating influence.



Employee buy-in and engagement, as evidenced by a recent cultural excellence inventory, also has increased. Overall staff and departmental relationships have improved with silos coming down, barriers disappearing and communication flowing in both directions. “I do not believe there is any area in our processes that hasn’t improved in the last two years,” says Andrews. “I think every day we get a new convert to what we call ‘being on the boat’ . “

Finally, as the organization realized positive outcomes from the senior leaders’ visibility

initiative, other service excellence groups jumped on the band wagon. The Standards of Performance, Safety, and Patient Engagement teams as well as the nursing departments and all leaders in the organization have implemented rounding in various forms to support staff and mission.

#### **The Last Word**

Senior Leader visibility is crucial to an organization's success. Cultural change is dependent on senior leadership setting the tone and expectations. Front line employees truly want to see and believe that their leaders understand, believe and care about the job they do and the challenges they face. Mon Valley is an excellent example of senior leadership devoting the time and commitment to weekly rounding and follow-through with employees; it's a process driven by a purposeful plan and tracked by a grid format.

Cyd Cadena, Consultant