

Developing effective leaders by understanding communication styles and stress triggers

A fast-growing regional medical center and its field offices wants to develop its managers and supervisors. How does it improve their leadership competencies?

Since its founding in 1885, Danbury Hospital has grown from a 22-bed community hospital to a 371-bed not-for-profit medical center and teaching hospital. Today it is part of Danbury Health Systems, which comprises seven healthcare affiliates and employs more than 3,300 people. For three years in a row—starting in 2004—Danbury Hospital has been named a Top 100 Hospital for Quality in the United States by Solucient, LLC, an organization that identifies top-performing hospitals based on quality outcomes and financial performance rankings.

Being the largest employer in the city of Danbury, Connecticut, Danbury faces tough competition for the highly qualified healthcare workers it needs for optimal performance and patient care delivery each day. Accordingly, a strategic focus at Danbury is on attracting and retaining what it calls “right-fit hires” and being recognized as a “Workplace of Choice.”

The company’s human resources group is tasked with ensuring that Danbury has a skilled and motivated workforce that believes Danbury is the “Best Place to Be.”

Business Challenges

- Increasing competition for highly qualified care staff
- Improving performance of leaders and managers

Company Profile

Danbury is a not-for-profit regional medical center and teaching hospital in Danbury, Connecticut. It is part of Danbury Health Systems, a network of seven healthcare affiliates with more than 3,300 employees.

Danbury

While Danbury was proud of what it had achieved, it knew it could do even better when it came to managing its people. According to Cynthia Sefton, a senior Learning Center consultant with Danbury, the company wanted to elevate the performance of its managers.

Since joining Danbury in 2001, Sefton had helped launch such major initiatives as Targeting Outstanding Performance Success (TOPS), Danbury's recognition and rewards program, and Value in People (VIP), its best-practice on-boarding program geared toward retaining first-year employees.

Another Danbury tool, the Performance Expectations Program (PEP), is aimed at performance management. Besides performance goals, PEP identifies five behavioral competencies called Traits for Success. Two of these Traits are leadership competencies— Driving Results and Managing and Motivating People. Danbury wanted managers to demonstrate improved performance against their PEP objectives and leadership traits.

Sefton was familiar with the Myers-Briggs® assessment and thought it could help. She says there was also impetus to use the MBTI tool with the organization's existing people management tools, not only to improve employee performance and business results but also to increase employee engagement and job satisfaction.

Solution

In the employee development field, it is well known that employees join companies but “quit” their managers. Danbury felt that the MBTI instrument would help its managers build better relationships with all members of its staff.

The bottom line, says Sefton, is that “satisfied employees deliver better quality and patient care, and both enhance loyalty to Danbury.”

Solution

- Integrate MBTI assessment into existing development programs
- Increase leaders' self-awareness
- Focus on communication styles and stress reactions – and impact on colleagues and patients

“ Everything we are doing is meant to help managers build their leadership competencies, ensuring employees are more motivated, productive, and satisfied. ”

Cynthia Sefton,
Senior Consultant, Danbury

Danbury

Criteria for success

Sefton wanted to work collaboratively with a consultant who could create a world-class management development program for its healthcare environment. That consultant would have to learn Danbury tools quickly enough to integrate them into a highly customized program. Further, Danbury felt the program would be a success if it

- Helped managers increase their self-awareness and develop the necessary skills and abilities to demonstrate a more effective leadership style
- Engaged managers in a variety of self-reflective assessments and interactive exercises that enabled them to learn from one another as well as the facilitators
- Could be applied to managers' day-to-day roles—better use of Danbury's people management tools (PEP, TOPS, and VIP) through type awareness
- Received high ratings from program participants and immediate feedback on how the learning could be uniquely applied to each participant and their daily roles as managers

Sefton was intimately involved in the development of the People Management curriculum, first researching vendors and screening referrals, then setting up interviews with selected consultants.

One of the most important requirements was that the program link to what managers do every day in working with their employees. It could not be just an academic exercise. Explained Sefton, "We're not here to supply nice information or because the MBTI assessment is a fascinating interpersonal journey. That isn't why the consultant was here. It was to give our managers and supervisors awareness of and insight into type so they could be more effective leaders. In order to do this, they needed to recognize their own blind spots and hot buttons, understand their natural strengths and preferred communication style, know how they reacted to stress and the impact this had on employees and patients, deal with conflict more

Results

- Practical learning points that improved management and motivation of direct reports
- Better understanding of behavioral change under stress
- Improved leadership competencies leading to better performing teams

Danbury



effectively, as well as foster teamwork and collaboration among co-workers. A tall order!”

While Danbury uses other assessment tools (critical thinking tests, etc.), Sefton was certified to use the MBTI instrument, as was her senior vice president, Phyllis Zappala, who heads up Human Resources at Danbury. They agreed that the MBTI assessment would work well at the core of Danbury’s People Management curriculum.

Program development launch

To launch the program, senior leaders were asked to nominate managers and supervisors to be inaugural participants. In preparation for the training, these participants took a battery of assessments for development purposes. They took the MBTI assessment each person received his or her assessment results, including the MBTI® Step II™ Interpretive Report and a one-hour feedback session with a Danbury Learning Center consultant. This was a prerequisite to Basic-Level People Management. Managers who completed the Basic-Level Program went on to the Plus-Level People Management Program (each program currently runs two to three times per year).

Results

The program has received rave reviews, with the average participant satisfaction rating above 95%. Said one participant: “This has been the best session in our entire people management curriculum. Everything I learned is going to help me better manage and motivate my staff.”

Our consultant said, “We knew the knowledge had to be transferable; it had to make an impact outside of that classroom. The MBTI assessment and other tools related to type also helped feed the managers’ development plans and transfer the learning from the classroom to the daily work environment.”

Participants leave the classroom with the beginnings of a real-life leadership development action plan. In a wrap-up class activity, program participants name at least one leadership strategy they are going to start doing and the one thing they will stop doing as a result of completing the course.

Danbury



“Most of the ‘aha!’ moments came when we were talking about type under stress and in the grip. We had an exercise that identified how people’s grip function plays out during stressful situations, and then managers learned what they can do about it. People were saying, ‘Wow, so this is what is happening, my order of preferences is changing, and that’s why my behavior is changing.’ The second biggest ‘aha!’ came after people reflected upon and then recorded their vulnerabilities and assets. Seeing them in writing seemed to make a dramatic impact.”


According to Sefton, “Word has spread very quickly about the program because it has received such high ratings. Managers have talked about it to other managers.” As a result, managers who have participated in the program say they have more confidence in their coaching abilities because they have learned practical solutions to enhance dialogue and interactions with employees. One participant said, “I gained a greater awareness of my own style, tendencies, and blind spots that impact my staff.” Another cited an increased ability to build and lead more dynamic, cohesive teams.

At Danbury, as in all organizations, managers must routinely work with people of many different personality types. According to People Management participants, the MBTI training gave them a much better understanding of their staff’s motivations and actions and how to help them be more productive.

Managers repeatedly commented on how helpful they found the segment on handling stress, using the *In the Grip* book. “I learned meaningful techniques for handling stress and knowledge of the associated trigger points for my type,” said one. Another observed, “I felt re-energized as a manager and learned techniques to continually refuel in our fast-paced, stressful healthcare environment.”

Danbury managers and supervisors enjoyed working with our consultant, expressing their appreciation for her comfortable teaching/consulting style and positive presence that encourages interaction and honest, open communication.

Danbury



Impressed with the results of the leadership program, Sefton created an opportunity for Danbury's Human Resources Partners to meet with the consultant to learn more about their unique dynamics as a recruiting team, and how individually they could benefit from a deeper understanding of their own type preferences.

"Everything we are doing is meant to help managers build their leadership competencies, ensuring employees are more motivated, productive, and satisfied," explains Sefton.



ABOUT THE MYERS-BRIGGS COMPANY

In our fast-changing world, your edge lies in harnessing 100 percent of your talent – whether you're at work, home, college, or anywhere in between. Your success and sense of fulfillment aren't just about what you know and what you can do, they hinge on your relationships and interactions with others.

The Myers-Briggs Company empowers individuals to be the best versions of themselves by enriching self-awareness and their understanding of others. We help organizations around the world improve teamwork and collaboration, develop inspirational leaders, foster diversity, and solve their most complex people challenges.

As a Certified B Corporation®, The Myers-Briggs Company is a force for good. Our powerfully practical solutions are grounded in a deep understanding of the significant social and technological trends that affect people and organizations.

With over 60 years in assessment development and publishing, and over 30 years of consultancy and training expertise, a global network of offices, partners and certified independent consultants in 115 countries, products in 29 languages, and experience working with 88 of the Fortune 100 companies, we're ready to help you succeed.

© Copyright 2019 The Myers-Briggs Company. MBTI, Myers-Briggs, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, The Myers-Briggs Company logo and the MBTI logo are trademarks or registered trademarks of The Myers & Briggs Foundation in the United States and other countries.