

THE WORKER OF THE FUTURE

A System Outlines the Competencies Its Employees Will Need

What will top healthcare workers of the future be like? What changes will providers need to make to identify and attract such workers? In 1993 the Sisters of Mercy Health System—St. Louis (SMHS) decided to create human resources programs that would enable it to recruit employees possessing certain competencies: those the system will need to carry out its mission in the twenty-first century.

SMHS established a Worker of the Future Task Force whose 11 members represented each of SMHS's eight regional operating divisions (called strategic service units, or SSUs) and a wide range of its professional disciplines (including administration, mission, education, nursing, and others). The task force was assigned two tasks:

- To clarify SMHS's principles and values
- To define the employee competencies that would best serve those principles and values, now and in the future

Summary In 1993, Sisters of Mercy Health System—St. Louis (SMHS), having asked itself what kind of employees it would need in the twenty-first century, established a Worker of the Future Task Force to develop tentative answers.

The task force began by making projections concerning healthcare, studying the strategic plans of SMHS's members, and surveying its employees. It learned that the system should help workers see how change could benefit them.

Next, the task force studied the cultural history of the Sisters of Mercy, developing from it Six Guiding Principles for the evaluation of employee performance. From these principles, the task force derived Twelve Competencies that SMHS will seek

THE TASK FORCE GOES TO WORK

The task force began its work by making certain projections concerning U.S. business and healthcare. With the aid of consultants, the task force's members studied corporate reorganization, the healthcare environment, various healthcare reform proposals, managed care, and capitation. They examined each SSU's strategic plan and interviewed SSU CEOs and members of the system's staff.

Finally, the task force conducted surveys and focus groups among SMHS's employees, in the process learning that:

- Employees understood that healthcare must change. But they feared that such change might cost them their jobs or force them to perform work for which they were not trained or suited.

- Although employees favored releasing non-contributing or nonsupportive workers, they said this should be done according to standards—and as part of a process—understood by everyone involved. They also said such actions should be carried out in a manner consistent with SMHS's

in future workers.

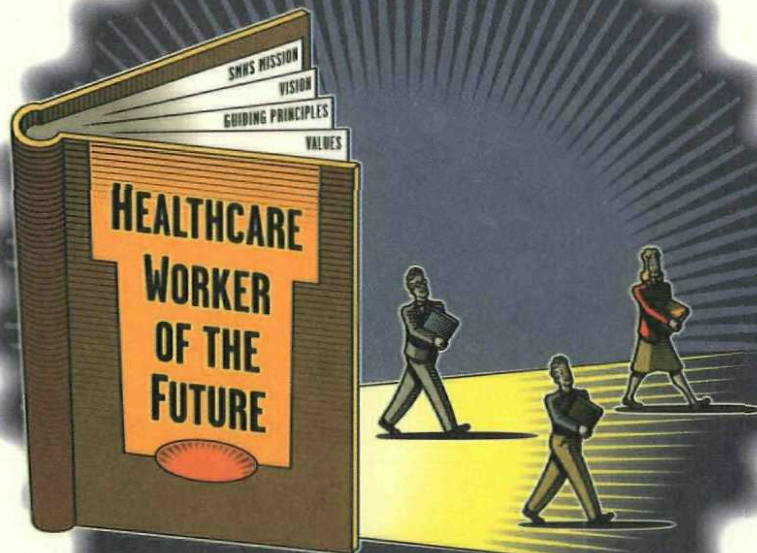
In 1995 the system's education leaders, with the aid of an internal training organization, decided to develop 17 training modules based on these guiding principles and competencies. Since then, more than 85 SMHS employees have been trained to help coworkers develop customer service skills and other competencies.

SMHS has also incorporated the competencies in its job descriptions and performance evaluations, added the Worker of the Future curriculum to its orientation program for new employees, and is currently developing Worker of the Future training sessions for human resources personnel who interview prospective employees.

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core values of dignity, justice, service, excellence, and stewardship.

- Most employees understood and embraced SMHS's mission, vision, and values. However, some employees said the mission, vision, and values tend to be interpreted and practiced in an inconsistent way.

- Some employees perceived SMHS's mission, vision, and values as being in conflict with each other. These employees said they were unsure how conflicting elements might be reconciled.

It became clear to the task force that before SMHS began making significant organizational alterations, it should help employees see the need for change, the rewards to be gained from it, and the roles they would play in bringing it about.

With these lessons in mind, the task force began thinking about the kind of worker SMHS should seek to recruit.

SIX GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The task force studied SMHS's cultural foundations, which were laid in 1831 when Mother Catherine McAuley founded the Sisters of Mercy in Dublin, Ireland, to care for the city's sick and poor. From this culture, the task force developed Six Guiding Principles to be used in evaluating

employee performance.

Live the Values SMHS should encourage employees to commit themselves to the system's mission, vision, and values. It should urge workers to always seek, in an environment of mutual respect and trust, to balance individual desires against the requirements of the common good.

Be an Organization of Opportunity and Growth SMHS provides fulfilling employment opportunities to those who have the appropriate skills, competencies, experience, and commitment. The system rewards behavior that is consistent with its values and disciplines behavior inconsistent with them.

Commit to Personal Development SMHS, believing that all employees have a responsibility to grow professionally, personally, and spiritually, encourages each to have a healthy balance in his or her life.

Practice Empowerment SMHS encourages excellence, creativity, and innovation. The system believes that all employees should participate in decision making, on one hand, and share accountability for outcomes, on the other.

Require Performance SMHS urges employees to add value to all they do, thus providing the optimum outcome for the communities they serve. To this end, the system encourages employees to collaborate, both as individuals and as members of teams.

Foster Communication SMHS promises to listen and respond to its employees' views and opinions. By the same token, it encourages employees to listen and respond to each other, to the system's customers, and to others the system serves.

TWELVE COMPETENCIES

From the Six Guiding Principles the task force then derived a dozen employee competencies. SMHS will require the competencies in its future workers, the task force said.

The Twelve Competencies differ from skills in that they include not only a worker's ability to perform a job, but also his or her desire or willingness to do so. In the past, most human resources systems have used job/task analysis to determine whether an applicant had the skills, knowledge, and experience to complete a particular job successfully. They did not determine whether the applicant had the necessary behaviors. In contrast, competency-based human resources systems look specifically at an applicant's behaviors and assess his or her job fit from them.

Mission Integration The employee not only understands the system's mission, vision, values, and guiding principles; he or she also aligns his or her own personal values and beliefs with them, thus bringing congruence and meaning to day-to-day work.

Organizational Commitment The employee, in aligning his or her own values with the organization's, gives highest priority to the common good.

Service Orientation The employee has a genuine desire to help others, especially those in need. He or she understands people's various needs and emotional states and can overcome obstacles in serving them.

Attitude toward Change The employee adapts to, and works effectively in, a variety of situations. Recognizing that change is often good, he or she can both cope with its threatening aspects and put its positive aspects to good use.

Personal Effectiveness The employee usually does more than the job requires. Along with initiative, he or she also has the self-confidence to offer opinions and make decisions, when those are needed.

Achievement Motivation The employee sets challenging objectives—and continually tries to exceed them.

Learning Orientation The employee seeks opportunities to learn, knows the history and current status of both SMHS and the healthcare ministry as a whole, collects and makes use of information relevant to work-based problems, and learns from mistakes.

Interpersonal and Team Performance The employee maintains positive relationships with coworkers, pays attention to others, functions well as a team member, and puts group goals before his or her own.

Respect for Differences The employee appreciates differences in style, approach, and background, knowing that such differences provide opportunities for creativity and innovation.

Focus on Quality The employee maintains high quality in his or her work.

Problem Solving The employee is adept at identifying problems and developing solutions to them.

Employees who lack the necessary values will be expected to change.

Task Accomplishment The employee accomplishes work within specified time and quality parameters. He or she is able, moreover, to focus on more than one task, project, or patient at a time.

What should be done with employees who do not work up to expectations? The task force decided that:

- Workers who share SMHS's values and have the necessary behaviors, but lack cer-

tain skills, will be given further training. If this does not suffice, the employee may be assigned to work better fitted to his or her abilities.

- Employees who lack the necessary values and behaviors will be expected to change. If they do not, they may be expected to leave. This may sound harsh, but a nonperforming employee is a negative force and can harm the organization's spirit.

IMPLEMENTING THE INITIATIVE

In 1995 SMHS's leaders decided that the Worker of the Future concept—including the Six Guiding Principles and the Twelve Competencies—should be an initiative throughout the system. The leaders said three factors would be critical in successfully implementing the initiative:

- The initiative must be "owned" and championed by CEOs and other system managers, each of whom must take responsibility for its success.

- System leaders must employ all available communications processes—including a feedback process—to ensure that the initiative is clearly understood by all employees.

- The Twelve Competencies must be the initiative's cornerstone.

Because SMHS is a decentralized system, each of its SSUs has flexibility in creating a local culture that supports the Six Guiding Principles and the Twelve Competencies. SMHS and its SSUs have nevertheless taken several steps to build consistency into the application of the Worker of the Future concept.

Training Modules In late 1995, SMHS and SSU education leaders enlisted Development Dimensions International, an internal training organization, to help create 17 customized train-

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ing modules. These modules have been in use since September 1996.

To date, five system employees have been certified to train instructors in the use of the modules, and more than 80 other workers have been certified as instructors. Each SSU selects the modules that will best fit its education needs. For example, several SSUs have decided to make the "service orientation" competency a strategic focus, selecting for it those modules that emphasize the development of customer service skills.


Job Descriptions and Performance Evaluations All SSUs have incorporated the Twelve Competencies in job descriptions and performance evaluations. In addition, all have incorporated the Worker of the Future curriculum in orientation programs for new employees.

Recruitment SMHS is currently developing training sessions for those human resources personnel who interview prospective employees. These sessions will help the system recruit people who, by demonstrating core competencies, reveal an ability to excel as a worker of the future.

A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

The SMHS worker of the future will be one who can continually and rapidly adapt to the ministry's changing needs. His or her experience and academic attainments will count for less than an ability to embrace the organization's values and a willingness to grow in the job.


In preparing employees for workplace change, SMHS accepts responsibility for helping them expand their skills and thus increase their employment opportunities. However, it is employees' responsibility to be open to change and learning throughout their careers. Workers of the future will embrace change, not fear it, seeing in it opportunities for both the organization and themselves. □

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WEAVING SPIRITUALITY

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