



A WHITEPAPER FROM ONSHIFT
7 Must-Have Manager Qualities
That Drive Employee Engagement

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Engagement is a key piece of the employee retention puzzle. When organizations experience high turnover, they often look for ways to improve staff satisfaction and engagement by initiating programs for frontline workers. But if the focus of these efforts is exclusively on employees, the organization may still be at risk.

Why?

Because employee engagement starts at the leadership level. Administrators, executive directors, department leaders and supervisors set the pulse for the community and their teams. As EVP at OnShift, Peter Corless notes, “Managers are everything. It starts at the top and trickles down. It permeates everything, from who you put into leadership positions to decisions you make about the allocation of resources.”

Gallup coined the term “cascade effect” to describe the effect a manager’s level of engagement has on their employees. In the U.S., 51% of managers are disengaged and 14% are actively disengaged¹. This lack of interest directly contributes to their direct reports’ engagement levels. So, just imagine the lack of engagement throughout a community where the executive director or administrator has mentally checked out or is actively disengaged.

If managers are not engaged, bigger problems may arise. A Gallup study on what employees look for in a manager found that one in two people had, at some point, left a job to “get away from their manager to improve their overall life.”²

Why Effective Managers Matter

Gallup estimates that only 10% of working people possess the talent needed to be a great manager and that managers account for at least 70% of the variance in employee engagement.³

“Leadership training isn’t something taught in nursing

school,” notes Chris Stach, Director of HR Support and Development at Altercare of Ohio. “That’s why we have a strong emphasis on leadership training for all nurse managers. Our leaders set the tone for our workforce and it’s important to have strong leaders.”

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– Chris Stach, Director of HR Support and Development
Altercare of Ohio

Shelly Szarek-Skodny, CEO of Century Oak Care Center, agrees. “The management of the workforce, the attraction, the retention and the employee engagement process is critical to the success of an organization.”

When an employee works for a manager who is ineffective and unengaged, their motivation and overall productivity will likely take a hit. This can quickly lead to them turning over, which is costly. In fact, Gallup estimates that unengaged managers cost the U.S. somewhere between \$77 billion to \$96 billion annually.¹

¹ Only 35% of U.S. Managers Are Engaged in Their Jobs, Gallup, 2015.

² Employees Want a Lot More From Their Managers, Gallup, 2015.

³ Why Great Managers Are So Rare, Gallup, 2014.

“The employee of today is far different than 25 years ago. We should adapt our leadership styles. We have to listen to our employees and be able to turn their words into strategic initiatives.”

– Shelly Szarek-Skodny, CEO,
Century Oak Care Center



Defining the Qualities of An Effective Manager

Considering the current state of the senior care industry—with its high turnover rates and labor shortages—the need to avoid disengagement among managers is imperative in your organization.

So, where do you begin?

It all starts with understanding each manager’s personal investment in the organization and their ability to engage and motivate employees. Here are seven qualities all successful managers in senior care possess.

Resilient & Adaptable

In a complex and ever-evolving industry, managers in senior care must be able to quickly adapt to situations as they change, remain focused under pressure and bounce back after a rough day on the job.

“We are in a constant state of change. I love that about the industry, but not everyone is able to cope with constant change.” Szarek-Skodny explains, “The way we’re reimbursed is constantly changing. The workflows are changing. The regulations have

changed. You need to be resilient and be willing to roll with the punches.”

Managers must also practice what Corless calls “situational leadership” and adapt to the generational, cultural and personal differences of the senior care workforce. “Different people require different management styles,” he says. “Managers have to be flexible. Some people need constant reinforcement, and other people don’t. They have to flex to fit the people they are working with.”

This also extends to dealing with larger, community-wide issues, like getting a poor resident review or a disappointing state survey. “Walking into a community that’s in crisis is much different than walking into a community where things are running smoothly,” notes Corless. “Managers have to evolve their tactics based on strategy and the environment they face.”

According to Szarek-Skodny, having this adaptive management mindset is key to creating an engaging environment. “The employee of today is far different than 25 years ago. We have to adapt our leadership styles. We have to listen to our employees and be able to turn their words into strategic initiatives.”



Fair & Equitable

Favoritism can be an engagement killer. That's why effective managers always remain objective, no matter the situation or the employees involved.

When managers have an equitable mindset, they're able to look at an employee for their contributions and outcomes first, leaving out any subjective notions they may have. Having a real-time view of employee behaviors and performance can help influence this equitable mindset, as it sets an objective, numbers-driven view of each member of the team.

This fair and equal mindset can also be effective when issues and conflicts arise. Strong managers are consistent with how they handle situations for all employees, maintaining an open mind and allowing the employee to provide their ideas for resolution.

"Managers should ask the employee for their solution to the problem," says Corless. "And if possible, they should try to use the suggestion or some portion of it since people are more committed to making their own ideas work, rather than ones that are imposed upon them."

And this notion can extend beyond conflicts. For example, when it comes to picking up open shifts, all employees should have an equal opportunity to fill in.

Often, a scheduler will approach their go-to employee



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that they know is always willing to help out without giving others a chance to step up. This favoritism can lead to staff dissatisfaction. Equitable managers understand that all eligible employees should be notified when a shift becomes available.

Strong Communicators

Communication in the workplace needs to extend beyond shop talk to build meaningful manager-employee relationships. Great managers in senior care take the time to get to know each staff member personally, creating a deeper connection, and increasing engagement.



“I think management’s job, whether you’re a director of nursing, an executive director, laundry manager, it really doesn’t matter...you have to learn how to connect with your staff and you need to do so as early as possible. You need to ask them: do you have kids? What are their ages? Are you married? What does your husband do? Where do you live? Do you take the bus here or drive a car?” Szarek-Skodny says, “Knowing your employees and connecting allows communication to flow openly.”

Szarek-Skodny also stresses the importance of management really listening to their staff, hearing what they want and putting their suggestions into practice. “Some leaders tend to not use effective listening skills. They’re contemplating their next statement instead of pausing to listen,” she continues. “It’s more important for us to put our ear to the

Additionally, a one-on-one meeting offers an excellent opportunity for managers to provide valuable feedback, discuss goals and evaluate performance to make sure everyone stays on track.

Leaders by Example

Engaged employees are motivated employees, so it’s no wonder that effective managers are also natural motivators. The best managers don’t just tell employees what to do. Instead, they take the time to also explain why and how it contributes. And, they work to instill a sense of purpose in both day-to-day tasks and long-term projects.

Most people who choose to go into the senior care profession do so with the intention of helping others. For managers, this desire should extend to helping their employees, as well as residents and patients.

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ground. We have to listen to our employees and incorporate their input. Effective listening is a class that we teach here with our managers. We encourage them to turn off their brain and really be engaged with what the speaker is saying.”

These types of communications can happen organically throughout the workday, but to maintain this level of communication across an entire team, managers should hold frequent one-on-one check-ins with each of their direct reports. During this time, managers and their employees get to know each other better to cultivate stronger relationships. Plus, these meetings offer employees a set time when they can discuss any concerns or issues that they’re facing.

In addition to helping their employees, managers need to make sure their behavior is in line with what they expect from their staff. This includes not letting events outside of work influence their behavior while at work.

Successful managers don’t bring their personal problems to work and understand they must be focused on the organization and their people. They try their best to not let what’s happening in the outside world get in the way of that.

Great managers take the time to notice each employee's strengths, recognize how they fit into their role and implement professional goals to build upon them.

"Some managers aren't able to leave their outside problems at the door and wear their emotions on their sleeve," says Corless. "If you're down, demotivated or beat up, your people cue off that. Even if you're not feeling your greatest, you still have to try to leave your negative things at the door and come in and inspire people."

Additionally, managers need to think of themselves as coaches. Leadership "takes one for the team" each and every day...literally. Managers are held responsible when direct reports don't perform, so great managers ensure their team has the tools they need to get the job done.

Strong managers consistently monitor each employee to make sure they're on the path to success and they aren't afraid to address potential problem areas. For example, when an employee has several call-offs in a row, their manager should have a private discussion with him or her to find out why, then work with the employee to develop a plan to get them back on track.

Facilitators of a Strengths-Based Culture

According to the Harvard Business Review, "A strengths-based culture is one in which employees learn their roles more quickly, produce more and significantly better work, stay with their company longer and are more engaged."⁴

And it makes sense. It's much easier to develop and enhance someone's natural abilities than it is to force them to adopt new ones. Great managers take the time to notice each employee's strengths, recognize how they fit into their role and implement professional goals to build upon them. Doing so results in satisfied employees who perform well and positively contribute to their organization's success.

High satisfaction can lead to high engagement. That's why effective managers keep a regular pulse

on how their team is feeling week-to-week or even day-to-day. Being able to send fast and frequent pulse surveys is a great way to cultivate this effective manager mindset. This approach allows managers to understand the overall satisfaction of their team, and provides individual employees an additional outlet to express concerns, achievements and goals. This also lets leadership see how each manager is doing with regards to collecting feedback, following up with employees and taking action on suggestions or concerns offered.

Committed to Learning & Growth

The most effective managers are those who are committed to lifelong learning. It's important that organizations cultivate this mindset and invest in the ongoing education of those in leadership roles.

"Whether through webinars or offsite training, it's very important to have structure in ongoing learning. People need to count on a constant information flow, investment in their education and your ability to sit and meet with them," says Szarek-Skodny, whose organization, Century Oak Care Center, conducts monthly leadership meetings with each manager to discuss their personal development goals.

In addition, effective managers recognize when they need some help and aren't shy to ask for it. "It's quite different when someone tells me my computer's not working versus I'm struggling with how to manage two distinct types of employees," Szarek-Skodny elaborates. "'Can you help me?' is probably the strongest question that you can hear from someone that works for you."

It's important to note that managers also need to be just as committed to the learning of their team members, as they are to their own personal development.

⁴What Great Managers Do to Engage Employees, Harvard Business Review, 2015.

“Managers can’t be promoted if everyone is totally dependent on them. They must make themselves independent in order to be promoted. They shouldn’t be afraid to delegate work,” says Corless. “However, there’s a difference between delegating and just dictating without providing the knowledge required to do it.”

Quick to Recognize & Reward Quality Work

Everyone likes to be recognized for a hard day’s work and today’s workforce craves consistent feedback and recognition for their contributions.

“Managers need to think about the choices they make and how they contribute to the culture they’re creating,” notes Corless. “This includes giving credit where credit is due and publicly recognizing the contributions of their staff.”

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Corless continues, “Management also needs to spend money in a way that shows their employees that they’re valued. For example, if they are ahead of budget, how can they take some money and do something nice for their staff in a way that is meaningful to them?”

Szarek-Skodny adds, “It’s very difficult when you’re at the top of a chain to figure out how to get to the person who is next to the bedside.

That’s why it’s very important to actually ask the nursing assistants, who are the majority of staff in any of these nursing facilities, what do they want? Let them vote. Let them bring up programs.”

The most effective managers regularly celebrate and show appreciation for their employees and don’t make recognition an afterthought.

“Everyone is out there trying to do an employee of the month club, the monthly cookout, celebrating Nursing Assistant Week,” Szarek-Skodny says. “That’s all great stuff but it’s that daily reward that can make a difference. For example, it can be as simple as recognizing if they entered in their activities of daily living or if the unit received 100% on that day. We want to reward that team, that unit or that individual. With daily management and consistent recognition, you’ll see engagement rise.”

Successful managers understand that a rewards and recognition program needs to be consistent. They go beyond the one-off pizza party and apply a systematic approach that makes it easy to regularly recognize and reward top performers.



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Putting the Pieces Together

How do you go about recruiting and developing great managers in senior care? Start by knowing what you're looking for. Be cautious of promoting or hiring someone that has great experience, but lacks managerial skills. Know what it takes to be a successful, devoted manager in each department and don't settle for anything less.

And, when developing managers from within your organization, Corless explains, "Who you promote is the best indication to others of what your values are." In other words, don't just bump someone up to a management position because of tenure, but make sure they properly represent the mission of your organization and can serve as a role model for their team.

Once you find a manager who fits the right criteria, make sure they have the tools they need to succeed and make their job easier and more efficient. The right technology can make a world of difference in a senior care manager's life, specifically when it comes to managing their employees, keeping tabs on their performance, rewarding their contributions and fostering stronger relationships.

The bottom line? When managers in senior care are engaged, they create a culture of engagement among their teams. It's a win-win for any senior care organization in today's challenging environment.

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