Cultivating and Nurturing a Successful Organizational Stress-management Program: Mission of Unlimited Possibilities

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Background: Organizations that value their employees and appreciate their contributions strive to create a supportive work environment. Leaders can demonstrate care and support for staff by offering a stress-management program. However, program implementation can be challenging. Leadership endorsement, funding, program development, and assimilation within the organizational culture are important elements. Demonstrating value is critical to success, and even the most effective programs may not provide leaders with the results they anticipated. What gets in the way?

Methods: This presentation provides a retrospective review of situations within Mayo Clinic that propelled its trainers to navigate the waters of uncertainty and rise above adversity. From a leadership perspective, a successful program requires ongoing intentional focus and promotion, not an easy task when resources are at a premium and organizational priorities are constantly vying for attention. When the trainers faced the prospect of program demise due to the loss of an executive sponsor and three of the four original trainers, the remaining members were at a crossroads. Rather than surrender to the lack of a well-defined champion, trainers decided to continue the legacy of sharing the gift of the Transforming Stress program with colleagues. Through the application of HeartMath coherence-building and -sustaining techniques, the remaining trainers listened to their own heart wisdom and found that each trainer possessed a unique skill set to contribute to the group. The information received during several group Heart Lock-In's guided the training team to collaboratively explore new ways of thinking.

Results: A fluid marketing plan includes methods of informing employees about the program, focusing on evidence-based benefits and motivating them to participate. At Mayo Clinic, it is crucial for training programs to create incentives and opportunities for employees to attend stress-management workshops. Trainers rearranged their training schedules, offered evening classes, developed a web and email presence, and created a variety of marketing tools that were highly effective. Individual class registration improved and entire departments (intact teams) were requesting workshops. Similarly, the weeks and months immediately after the workshop, during which the employee is introduced to new techniques and tools, are critical. Answering their questions in real time via email or in person and keeping them engaged in the application of these emotional refocusing techniques were highly valued by individuals and groups alike. These efforts contributed significantly to the ongoing success and evolution of our program.

Conclusion: By the end of the presentation, attendees learned how to identify potential challenges associated with program maintenance and expansion; describe coherence-building strategies for trainers, individuals, and teams; and conceptualize internal marketing approaches and practical applications to grow and sustain a resilient program within an organization. As part of a robust employee benefits package, the perception of a caring work environment may lead to reduced staff turnover, feelings of joy and fulfillment among staff, and increased organizational loyalty, as well as serve as a competitive recruitment tool.

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