

Positive Cultures Must Start with Gratitude

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Culture. It is referred to in a number of ways and situations. Merriam-Webster defines culture as the characteristic features of an everyday existence shared by people in a place or time; the shared set of attitudes, values, goals and practices that characterize an institution or organization. Let's stop for a moment and consider our workplace and culture. If we had to describe our culture in a few words, what would they be?

Last year, among the chaos of the pandemic, Accordant conducted a survey of health care CEOs to gather assessments of their cultures at the time. No doubt culture was a tricky subject prior to the pandemic, but the challenges multiplied with 2020's remote home office workplaces. Many lost their sense of belonging, of being part of a team. Most were tasked with phone calls and Zoom meetings serving as the only way to stay connected to each other and to our donors.

As Americans are vaccinated and restrictions are lifted, many of us find ourselves returning to the office, even if for just a few days a week. We are slowly adjusting to being present, social and in person. We most likely are feeling our work life could be back to "normal" soon. Innovative leaders are taking advantage of this transition time, making changes around culture that will result in more positive, grateful work environments. These are not only taking place within the C-Suite and leadership levels but also with frontline physicians, clinicians and support

staff. Gratitude and positivity start at the top and must flow throughout the entire organization for an authentic difference to be felt. If 2020 showed us nothing else, it brought attention to the fact that the entire health care organization must rely on each other, lift each other up and pull each other through...no matter what the circumstances. Gratitude for health care workers was front and center every day. How can we, as leaders, keep the gratitude momentum going and keep our team members encouraged, motivated and supported?

Frontline workers in patient care are especially exhausted. Their well-being has been greatly threatened from the past year's stressful work situations. It's time for health care organizations to pull out the necessary tools to prevent further erosion and even reverse some of the ill effects and habits. It's time to put gratitude in the forefront.

Gratitude is the heart of a healthy, values-based culture and can be THE valuable tool we use to stop culture deterioration and even turn the culture around completely. Gratitude isn't just a feel-good word to be tossed around carelessly. Research on gratitude proves strong, scientific benefits on physiological and psychological health. Our frontline workers survived many days thanks to gratitude from others and a clear sense of purpose.

We are currently seeing clinical burnout at astonishing rates, yet we are learning that when gratitude is exchanged, it helps elevate the culture of an entire organization. As humans, we need to know our work matters and we have a distinct purpose that is recognized and appreciated. We also have an instinctive nature to be generous with one another, furthering the concept of gratitude. We must embed the practice of gratitude in the attitudes and actions of our organizations. Moreover, when employees are positively engaged as individuals and as teams, they are likely providing excellent care, thereby positively impacting patient experience scores.

As many team members return to on-site work and in-person interaction, now is the time to improve and enhance our cultures. Make it a priority to integrate gratitude into the core of our organizations. Discover how the time and investment can develop more fulfilled employees and increased patient satisfaction. Building a healthy gratitude-based culture requires great dedication and commitment, yet incorporating gratitude into daily professional and personal activities, as referenced in our [Gratitude Habits Worksheet](#) is a great first step in the journey. And it may even allow you to enjoy an occasional Zoom meeting again.

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