



Improving Morale and Increasing Psychological Safety

Steven Lovett, Ph.D.
Chief, Psychology
VA Palo Alto

Lisa K. Kearney, Ph.D., ABPP
Associate Director for Education
VA Center for Integrated Healthcare

George Shorter, Ph.D.
Chief, Psychology Service
North Florida/South
Georgia Veterans
Health System



Objectives

1. Identify areas which negatively impact staff morale and what is within and outside leadership control.
2. Discuss protective factors for helping staff cope with negative media.
3. Discuss methods for leadership to improve staff morale through building community, engagement and resilience.



Common Negative Factors Impacting Staff Morale

Common Negative Factors Impacting Staff Morale

- Lack of desired job autonomy
- Perceived lack of fairness or lack of recognition in ratings of job performance
- Psychological Safety / Dissatisfaction with interactions with colleagues and supervisors
- Lack of promotional opportunities
- Others ?

Common Negative Factors Impacting Staff Morale

Contributions from Participants

- Job security / Concerns about privatization
- Lack of resources to accomplish work
- Pressures to meet productivity measures
- Managing large numbers of patients (panel size)
- Lack of information / communication about changes affecting one's job
- Lack of input in decisions about changes affecting one's job

Common Negative Factors Impacting Staff Morale

Contributions from Participants -continued

Factors affecting Managers:

- Pressures to meet access requirements
- Concerns about wRVU productivity measures
- Budgetary concerns
- Space limitations
- Labor concerns

15 Dimensions of Morale¹

1. *Confidence* that group can perform its specific tasks and achieve its broader goals
2. *Enthusiasm* for the daily activities of the group
3. *Optimism* that the group will experience more success than failure
4. Belief in the group's *capability*, based on its personnel, training, past history, and observation of similar groups succeeding
5. *Resilience* in the face of adversity and challenges
6. *Leadership* that recognizes, values, and respects the contributions of group members; good leaders vis-à-vis morale are those who empower, nurture, and develop individual members of the group, who share hardships with them; who establish an ethical climate, and who foster open communication
7. *Mutual trust and respect* between group members and leaders shown in the conviction that all can fulfill their respective duties as well as look out for the interests of the group and other group members

15 Dimensions of Morale¹

8. *Loyalty* to the group and its members
9. *Social cohesion* between and among group members
10. A *common purpose* that is understood, accepted, and pursued by group members
11. *Devotion* to group members and to the group as a whole, shown by mutual care, support, and kindness
12. *Sacrifice* of the individual's needs and well-being for the good of the group
13. A *compelling group history* that is both a source of pride and a set of high expectations for future performance
14. Concern with the *honor* of the group
15. A sense of *moral rightness* about the group and its tasks that provides the group members with a sense of meaning



Dealing with Bad News

How to Deal with Bad Publicity

- Resolve issues before they become a problem
- Take quick action to counter bad news.
- Counteract inaccuracies.
- Say you are sorry.
- Offer a written statement. This buys time and can let you organize a more in depth response with action.
- Deflect a bad story - Understand that bad news sells but maybe there are good news stories that can take the attention away from the bad news
- Review all incidents and see what could have been done to lead to a better outcome.
- Rebuild your reputation/morale by generating more good news stories.

When bad things happen, focus on your stakeholder's concerns

What might be the primary concerns for the following stakeholders?

- Employees
- Veterans and their families
- Management
- Community leaders
- Politicians
- Media
- Other?

How to Craft a Message

- Honesty is key
- Facts are helpful, especially simply stated facts
- A simple narrative can be compelling and easily shared
- Think about what you want to share and pivot toward those points/stories



Methods for Improving Psychological Safety and Morale

Building Psychological Safety

- Focus on building true teams which aids in addressing natural task conflicts which will arise¹
- Practice leadership skills which show inclusiveness and accessibility^{2,3}
- Admit when you have done wrong as a leader³
- Hire program managers that reflect these values^{2,3}
- Teach and demonstrate through modeling the ability to express openly differences of opinion in constructive manners^{4,5}
- Make it OK to make mistakes as part of daily work^{6,7}
- Celebrate unique diversity of your team members that strengthens the overall team^{6,7}

Building Psychological Safety: Personal Application

Think for a moment about a time in which you felt psychological safe at work to voice a concern or acknowledge an error. What about your team or boss helped you feel comfortable enough to do so?

Leader Factors Enhancing Psychological Safety Identified by Participants

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consistent communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Humility
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Concerned	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Protective / supportive of staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Validation of staff efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Calm demeanor
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supportive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Follows up on actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collaborative	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Available to staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sincere	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decisive decision maker
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Compassionate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fair / Trustworthy
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sincerely concerned	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Humane
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Flexible	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Genuine
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Problem-solving oriented	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focused on veterans needs

Building Staff Morale

- Engage their dreams professionally and personally¹
 - Get to know each of your staff individually
 - Support their dreams specifically
- When making change, involve all stakeholders in the process²
- Be an authentic leader who displays humility³
 - Own your flaws
 - Say I am sorry
 - Recognize your team in accomplishments
- Express trust in your team³

Building Staff Morale

- Intentionally focus on creating community
 - Particularly important with growth of services and virtual employment
 - Build in times for communication
- Provide methods for leadership development and training^{1, 2}
- Motivate not through performance metrics but through a focus on improved service, quality of care³
 - Remember why your team has selected to work at the VA

Building Staff Morale: Personal Application

Think for a workplace where you felt great morale. What was different there? What can you emulate from the leadership at that location?

Discussion – Examples of Morale Enhancing Activities Provided by Participants

- Organized efficient agenda for meetings
- Shared mission, goals for the team (& beyond)
- Time together for team members
- Collaborative decision making
- Enjoying and appreciating what people do outside the workplace.

Discussion – Examples of Morale Enhancing Activities Provided by Participants - continued

- Get stakeholders involved.
- Have a clear vision for team that people buy into.
- Recognize that it is a team effort and success.
- Focus on goals of metric rather than just the metric.
- Be accessible

Discussion – Examples of Morale Enhancing Activities Provided by Participants - continued

- Giving awards and acknowledging what team is doing well.
- Incentive systems.
- Feeling like everyone is invested in each other
- Enhancing staffs' perception that they can contribute.
- Learn from trainees.

Discussion – Examples of Morale Enhancing Activities Provided by Participants - continued

- Open communication
- Transparency
- Shared space
- Build teams across disciplines
- Rely on each other – be able to go to others and ask for help
- Sense of shared mission