

Key to reform: enlightened leadership



Don't count on Washington to improve care

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There has been a lot of policy debate on healthcare reform. I have purposely tuned a lot of it out because frankly, no one is saying how on a day-to-day basis it will affect the average American.

In terms of healthcare delivery, the need will not change. The U.S. is ranked 37th in the World Health Organization and we are plagued with chronic conditions. We will

need services across the aging continuum. And we will need nursing homes.

This brings us to person-centered, care, culture change, experience management—whatever you want to call it.

I have some theories as to why it has not caught on and will not until we think differently about leadership.

Firefighters are treated like heroes; healthcare workers, not so much. So part of it, in my opinion, is building cultures that recognize this and help people release the fear and anxiety. That is not part of any rewards and recognition system. It gets fundamentally deeper.

It contributes to the notion that for many, long-term care is a job, not a career, calling or passion. That points to more fundamental issues about how our culture looks at aging.

Is healthcare reform going to aid this? No. With an eye toward squeezing dollars from the system, bottom line-motivated people will hunker down and continue business as usual.

Enlightened and visionary leadership will change the industry,

however. They recognize that educating the public about aging issues is not just the right thing to do but also builds relationships and what we marketers call tipping points for choice. When they need a service like the one you offer who will they think of first?

Enlightened and visionary leadership knows that changing the employee experience will change the resident experience and people will talk about it.

That's marketing. That generates future revenue. That reduces attrition. That retains the best and allows you to hire the best.

Enlightened and visionary leadership recognizes that culture change is not the program of the day, driven by more rules and regulations.

So don't look to healthcare reform to solve systemic cultural issues in long-term care.

The Harvard Business Review has an excellent article on leadership, "Leadership in a (Permanent) Crisis." (See it here: <http://www.4wardfast.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/leadership-in-a-permanent-crisis.pdf>.)

It contends that even when we recover from the economic down-

turn, new leadership must emerge or organizations will perish.

Enlightened and visionary leadership, they contend, use times like these not to hunker down but to press the "reset" button, changing the rules of the game, redefining the work, changing the organization.

Enlightened and visionary leadership will understand that empathy will assist in cultivating loyalty and an understanding that employees are not following the organization down a blind path but are helping to uncover the path with you.

Enlightened and visionary leadership realize that empowering staff with tools allows them to collaboratively solve problems. It helps create context. That sets off light bulbs in people's heads so that they figure out how to make the long-term care experience better for everyone.

The bottom line is that trusted leadership recognizes the fragile life-and-death nature of long-term care and allows staff to celebrate and grieve and become empowered to change it, to make it better.

Don't look for healthcare reform to make this happen. Look inside yourself. ■

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