

Toolkit Addendum: An Introduction for Leaders



The Business Case for Promoting Compassion

For administrators and leaders, there is a particular interest in and strong business case for promoting and improving the compassion and wellbeing of employees. Burnout and compassion fatigue have a significant negative effect not only on providers themselves, but also on clients and the organization as a whole. Not surprisingly, burnout and job dissatisfaction can lead to decreased productivity and increased rates of turnover, both of which can be significantly costly. Conversely, an engaged, satisfied workforce that holds a positive attitude toward the organization and its values is associated with improved performance, professional productivity, lower turnover rates, improved patient experience, outcomes, and safety, which can all substantially reduce costs.¹ Further, compassion in the work environment helps organizations attract and retain talented providers, bring in patients and deliver high-quality care.² All of this leads to greater sustainability and financial performance of organizations.

What Makes a Compassionate Organization?

Teams that are more compassionate retain more customers, are more successful at reaching goals, and bounce back more quickly when experiencing a challenge. Research demonstrates that these successful compassionate teams:

- Listen to customers more-adjust and respond to needs more quickly
- Are more interdependent, success is a team effort
- Integrate compassion into routines, processes, and systems
(How can I make each routine a little more empathetic or compassionate?)
- Have authentic leadership role models
- See problems and challenges as opportunities for empathy and curiosity

There are three processes that have been shown to contribute to organizational compassion: Collective noticing, feeling and responding to pain within an organization.³ These become collective when they are legitimated, propagated and coordinated, and leadership plays a key role in promoting this collective compassion. Policies and shared values, systems and technologies, routines, and modeling by leaders all have a significant impact. Remember, training and education on compassion and resilience is beneficial, but will not “withstand unsupportive or toxic organizational cultures,” and support from leaders and a belief in the importance of compassion is of utmost importance.

¹ Perlo J., Balik B., Swensen S., Kabcenell A., Landsman J., Feeley D. (2017). *IHI framework for improving joy in work. IHI White Paper.* Cambridge, MA: Institute for Healthcare Improvement.

² *The Schwartz Center for Compassionate Healthcare.* (n.d). *Compassion in action with Monica Worline.* Boston, MA: The Schwartz Center.

³ Kanov, J., Maitlis, S., Worline, M. Dutton, J., Frost, P., & Lijius, J. (2004). *Compassion in organizational life.* *American Behavioral Scientist*, 47(6), 808-827

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What Can Leaders Do?

To develop leadership for compassionate health care, you must acknowledge and make considerations for the challenges of working in a high-pressure, anxiety-laden context like health care. Leaders should offer adequate training and well-being programs, build and maintain trust and supportive relationships, and promote the sharing of knowledge, skills, and workload across silos. It requires allowing providers to experiment without fear of reprisal, to reflect on their work, and to view errors as opportunities for learning and improvement.⁴

Throughout the toolkit there will be activities and tips specifically aimed at leaders in health care organizations that can support you in promoting and improving compassion and well-being in the work environment.



Further Resources

In the [IHI Framework for Improving Joy in Work](#) (specifically pages 16-20), **9 critical components for improving joy in work** are outlined, and the role effective leaders have in promoting each component is discussed. This can be a great resource for thinking about specific actions you can take to build the well-being and resilience of employees.

The American Medical Association has developed [a module](#) with **9 steps for leaders to take** to create the organizational structural elements that support joy, purpose and meaning in work. The steps are organized by three reciprocal domains of provider well-being and fulfillment: Culture of Wellness, Efficiency of Practice, and Personal Resilience. While it is directed toward physicians, it can be applied to many settings in the health care field.

*In reading through both of these resources, take some time to think about how you and your organization are currently fulfilling or taking steps to create a foundation of joy in the workplace. For those steps that are not being taken at this time, consider what actions might need to occur to begin fulfilling them.

⁴ Zulueta, P. (2015). *Developing compassionate leadership in health care: an integrative review*. *Journal of Healthcare Leadership*, 8, 1-10.

