

What Are the Keys to Attracting and Retaining Qualified Staff in Healthcare?



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For the CEO's of many organisations in the healthcare industry, attracting and retaining talent is the key strategic challenge, as discovered in a 2017 survey by Siemens Healthineers. Organisations face the dual challenge of how they should respond to the need for significant efficiency gains and simultaneously be an attractive employer in a competitive labour market.

Fuelled by demographic trends, the demand for healthcare grows and with it, the cost burden for economies across the globe. This leads to increasing pressure on operators of healthcare facilities to provide higher patient outcome at lower cost. At the same time, labour markets struggle to supply sufficient numbers of qualified nurses and doctors, as low unemployment rates in the sector show.

The utilisation of modern technology, such as the automation of clinical workflows, easier access to patient information, and the mining of medical data to support care decisions is one lever to increasing workforce efficiency. The other is the development of an attractive work environment to enhance employee engagement and the brand as an employer in the labour market. But how can efficiency measures go together with creating such a work environment?

At Siemens Healthineers, we took a multi-step approach. First, we invited top managers to discuss what fundamental principles would be important in the way we operate, not only with each other, but also with partners and customers. The outcome of this discussion was not the generic values statement one can often find on corporate websites, but a set of seven principles which can be applied very operationally and offer the opportunity to take out complexity as they align ways of working on an overarching level, rather than on a detailed policy and procedure level. Second, we decided to implement a company brand name which is people-centric: Siemens Healthineers describes a community of people who are united by a joint mission. Using such a community-oriented brand has the potential to decrease the separation between employee and employer. Next, we engaged our workforce worldwide, as well as specific external target groups to learn how we are perceived today as an employer and what factors are most relevant to enhance the future attractiveness of our work environment. Surprisingly, across all cultures and organisational structures, the most attractive aspects were a strong sense of purpose, developing opportunities, and a culture of trust and autonomy. These outcomes were used to define fundamental beliefs of how we want to treat people in our organisation.

As for many employers in our sector, it is relatively easy to create a strong sense of purpose due to the immediate impact of effective healthcare on the greater good of society. Also, development opportunities are fuelled by the strong dynamic of our market with changing skill requirements and new job profiles emerging. More difficult is the implementation of a culture of trust and autonomy in a highly regulated industry with intense economic pressure and a push for standardisation of clinical procedures. The solution lies in a balance of providing autonomy for working teams, while ensuring accountability for outcomes. What drives accountability in such an approach are not extrinsic factors such as top down performance reviews and incentive schemes, but a culture of ownership and a personal identification with the purpose of the work.

Promising examples such as Heiligenfeld Clinics in Germany or the Dutch care provider Buurtzorg demonstrate that these models not only are possible in our industry, but deliver both economic value as well as an attractive work environment. They do, however, require a different model of leadership. Rather than a classic distinction between managers and employees, all levels of the organisation need to step up and take responsibility. In return, autonomy offers the opportunity to personally influence the work environment and take a lead. Managers have to put more emphasis on their role as coaches, as their value add comes less from being the decision maker but rather from explaining the purpose and then coaching teams to identify solutions themselves and giving feedback on how to improve.

At Siemens Healthineers, we embarked on this journey and are piloting new ways of working, because we are convinced that they will enable us to contribute to solving the big challenges of our industry.

Zoom On

What is your top management tip?

Be passionate about what you stand for and humble in leading people.

What would you single out as a career highlight?

Besides the opportunity to contribute to the mission and development of Siemens Healthineers I am grateful for having worked as a hospital janitor at age 15 because it taught me respect for employees at all levels and for having worked at the World Bank as it gave me a geo-political perspective.

If you had not chosen this career path you would have become a...?

Shepherd on an alp in the Alps.

What are your personal interests outside of work?

Enjoying time with my three kids, rock climbing, and exploring the world.

Your favourite quote?

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, concerned citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has. — Margaret Mead

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