

# Change: It's always changing!



by Joanne L. Smikle

**K**eeping up with the helter-skelter chaotic pace of change that has become the norm in health care is tough, particularly if you are charged with overseeing the functions that impact the overall survival of the facility. But use this change to the strategic advantage of the company? It can seem like the impossible dream, but strong leaders use change effectively and move beyond resistance, reluctance and inertia.

You can implement these three strategies to use change to your advantage and to the advantage of your enterprise.

### **Quick turnaround as a norm:**

It is essential that you begin directing your staff to get rapid results. That happens when you make it clear that quick, accurate results are necessary because change happens so fast. You cannot afford the luxury of inaction,

### **Leadership strategies to help you get and stay ahead of the curve**

inertia or "analysis paralysis." Begin establishing clear timeframes for completion of every task in the facility, from processing employment applications, to responding to patient/family requests, to researching new marketing approaches. Whatever the job, make it clear that you expect results very quickly.

**Allergies to innovation:** Find the areas where your organization seems hardened or inflexible. What are the policies and practices that seem cast in stone or lacking relevance? Which systems are overly complex or so convoluted that they don't meet the needs of the patients and their families?

Where are the inconsistencies between policy and practice? Answering these questions will help you figure out where you're stuck. Once you have identified these problem spots, start with small changes geared towards maximum efficiency. Good leaders celebrate each small success and then launch the next innovation. Keep working to gently guide people. Of course, I am assuming that *you* are not the rigid, inflexible one!

**Meaningful alignments:** Make sure that policies, practices and values are synchronized. Align action to values. The company's overarching philosophy should be clearly reflected in every system and service. This ongoing process calls for leaders to identify and correct any misalignments and create new alignments. Example: A facility that boasts a family-friendly environment but has a grumpy malcontent "greeting" visitors at the door. It's very basic. Be sure you have taught everyone the very skills you want them to demonstrate to customers. Have customer-focused folks on the front-line. Make life just a little easier for the families. Doing so creates an easy meaningful alignment right there.

## SPEAKING OUT...

### **Encouragement, not criticism**

*(Editor's note: The following letter was published in the Palm Beach Post January 12, 2004, written in response to an earlier first-person account of the recent death of the reporter's 96-year-old mother. The newspaper story was critical of nursing homes and the people who work in them. Eventually the reporter transferred his mother to his own home to care for her himself for as long as he could.)*

Editor:

Regarding The *Palm Beach Post's* Dec. 28 article "Into the gentle night" by Michael Browning: The reporter should be commended for caring for his dying mother at home. Not every family can or will do that, which is why nursing homes are essential parts of their communities. The dedicated nurses and certified nursing assistants who work in those nursing homes 24 hours a day, seven days a week, help their frail, elderly patients attain the highest quality of life possible, even if the patient has a chronic illness or when death may be near.

It's true that not everybody can do this demanding job — it really takes a special person. So instead of criticizing them, we ought to be praising and encouraging them so that we'll always have enough people to staff our nursing homes and care for the increasing number of elderly in Florida.

Readers can help improve nursing home care by urging their federal and state lawmakers to support adequate Medicare and Medicaid financing, which is what pays for almost all nursing home care. Only when America's nursing homes have adequate resources can they provide the quality of care their patients deserve and their families expect.



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### **Ahead of the curve**

It may be unpalatable at times, but the rapid-fire pace of change in today's health care environment is a fact of life. Rather than stressing out, decide to take action to make change work for you. Even if you're not a manager or the administrator, be the initiator of ideas that will positively impact the facility. Use the strategies detailed in this article to get and stay ahead of the curve.

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