

CASE STUDY: EMPOWERING JUNIOR EMPLOYEES VOICE OF THE SCIENTIST

Situation

When we see signs that a strategy, structure, technology or process is inefficient, we naturally want to change the way we do things. But introducing change – especially in a large organization – isn't easy. Even suggesting change for improvement is tricky. Where do you take your ideas? Who will listen to them? And will they be taken seriously?

Bench scientists represented ~ 70% of the basic research population at a large cap pharmaceutical company, but tended to be a silent majority – clearly a lost opportunity.

Action

I collaborated with PhD level scientists to identify vocal members of their areas who might be interested in changing lab processes to create more efficiency. Five teams were formed with a PhD mentor assigned to each team. Brainstorming identified focus areas of Communications & Leadership, Operational Excellence, Employee Satisfaction, Career Development, and Lab Processes.

Result

This empowered team of 30 bench scientists identified and implemented myriad changes in the labs. A sampling of their accomplishments includes:

- increased utilization of robotic technology,
- 30% reduction in alarm dispatches,
- implementation of a \$2 million day shift cleaning initiative
- establishment of various technical and employee development training forums to further personal growth.

Lasting impact

The concept was so well received by senior management that the concept was replicated at three other locations. Yet perhaps the biggest triumph is that this team 'voice' concept is starting to impact other areas of the business with anticipated positive changes to the business processes and culture.

Keys to success:

- Ensuring very strong participation and support from senior management provided the time and resources for success
- Choosing vocal participants who weren't satisfied with the status quo created energy – delivering quick wins built on that energy
- Avoiding structure at the outset immediately empowered the participants and gave them a sense of ownership – this was especially important with many other highly structured and monitored change initiatives
- Having a single champion was critical to sustaining this cultural change initiative
- Publicizing accomplishments rewarded participants and created a "bench" of next generation "Voice" members
- Establishing a fixed service term of two years with a one year extension avoided burnout in a voluntary role



What people are saying....

- *"I met Ed when he helped found a site-wide task force called "The Voice of the Scientist." Ed has facilitated our meetings with a rare mixture of candor, humor, and a clear vision of deliverables. Our company is going through an extended period of transformation, and I really rely on Ed to help me stay compliant with new policies while maintaining my sanity."**
 - *"Ed's greatest strength is his sincere interest in others, ability to analyze complex situations, and being a trusted advisor."**
 - *"I trust his instincts, value his friendship, and would heartily endorse him for any role requiring exceptional people management skills, regardless of the setting."**
 - *"He works fantastically with teams and is an excellent motivator because he is so friendly and inspiring."**
- * Comments made by colleagues and managers in an anonymous online survey.