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Resources for Nursing Home Professionals

Creating a Learning Organization

Staff training is key to nursing home culture change, and it shouldn't be limited to formal training sessions. Taking advantage of teachable moments—situations that open the door to allow for learning at almost any time—engages learners and sparks curiosity, improving learning and retention. This FastFacts focuses on how to capitalize on teachable moments and make your facility a learning organization.

Using and Creating Teachable Moments

- **Teaching can happen anytime.** Teachable moments occur every day, but without a dedicated nursing instructor these opportunities can slip away. Do not wait for mandatory in-service training to educate your staff—employees can learn even in casual moments. Take advantage of learning opportunities as they arise.
- **Recognize teachable moments.** The optimal teachable moment is when a staff member says or does something that indicates they are open to learning. Teachers must learn to recognize these opportunities as they occur and turn them into valuable lessons.
- **Ask open-ended questions.** Empower staff by involving them in care decisions and asking for their opinions. Encourage them to share their thoughts and concerns. Ask questions such as, "How is today going for you?" or, "How is this resident doing today?" Asking staff whether they have any professional concerns encourages dialogue and can present a learning opportunity. For example, ask the nursing staff, "What problems have you encountered today?" This helps staff become active and independent learners as well as problem-solvers.
- **Praise staff and highlight accomplishments.** Staff must believe that they are capable and worthy in order to learn effectively. Praising staff members for their accomplishments helps boost self-esteem and contributes to a friendly work atmosphere. Always pass along compliments from co-workers or family.

■ **Provide feedback promptly.** If a staff member is not performing well, it is important to provide feedback as soon as the poor performance is observed. First establish a positive connection with the staff member, and then address your concerns. Find out whether the staff member recognized that something was done incorrectly and why it was mishandled. Together, discuss how to better handle similar situations in the future.

Become a Learning Organization

- **Empower the director of staff development.** Appoint the director of staff development to help make your facility a learning organization. Give your director the tools, resources, and responsibility to help everyone become a better employee. Support the director in helping staff to recognize and use teachable moments.
- **Foster a learning environment.** Form study groups so staff can discuss matters such as ways to handle aggressive residents or new methods for preventing pressure ulcers. Encourage discussion of recent medical and nursing journal articles addressing clinical topics relevant to your organization. Hold regular brainstorming meetings to generate ideas for improving care. Encourage dialogue among different groups, such as the nursing and housekeeping teams, and have them meet regularly to discuss issues and how to resolve them.
- **Use interactive adult teaching strategies.** Lecturing is useful for presenting factual information to a large number of people, but is too passive for real learning. Adults learn better with dynamic and interactive methods such as role-playing, simulation, small group discussions,

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or written assignments. To help staff stay engaged and attentive, try reviewing a recent case study or simulating a difficult resident encounter.

- **Ensure instructors and staff learn together.** Learning should be a reciprocal process, where both the teacher and staff can learn by jointly performing research, reading an article, or showing how to perform a task more efficiently. Demonstrate a new task such as dressing a pressure ulcer, and then perform the task with a staff member. The teacher and staff will bond while learning together, and the staff member will feel valued and respected as a central part of an interactive learning experience.
- **Use “teach back” to check comprehension.** Rather than asking staff if they understand what they are learning, ask them to repeat the material in their own words. This method of checking comprehension, called “teach back,” provides an ideal opportunity to correct any misunderstandings. Have staff reword responses so they are correct.
- **Student-centered teaching encourages critical thinking.** Student-centered learning focuses on the person, not the material to be learned. Unlike teacher-centered learning, student-centered teaching helps staff learn how to grow. Discussion and debate are important to developing critical thinking skills. Encourage staff to question and engage in the learning process.
- **Enhance staff leadership in learning activities.** Allow staff from all levels of the facility to take on a leadership role when learning. For example, have a new certified nurse’s aide facilitate a group learning discussion, contribute articles for study, or discuss an interesting resident care incident. This ensures staff know they play an essential role in learning and that their contributions are important to the entire organization.

References

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Use a Coaching Approach

- **Understand the role of coaches.** The main goal of coaching is to help workers develop problem-solving skills, not to tell staff what they should be doing. Coaches work cooperatively with employees to help them solve problems and hold them accountable for their performance.
- **Create relationships with employees.** Show interest in your staff and treat them as people, not just as employees. Acknowledge an employee’s interests and nurture the relationship. Encourage them to share their perspective. Ask questions such as, “What else can we do to prevent falls?” or, “How do you feel about our quality improvement plan?”
- **Help define and achieve goals.** Coaches are primarily concerned with helping staff proceed from action step to action step to achieve professional goals. Set concrete plans, deadlines, and outcomes so that employees understand what is expected of them. Follow up regularly to see how goals are progressing and to assess if additional goals are necessary or if current goals need to be modified. Ask employees, “What can I do to help you do your job better?”

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