



Oakwood Hospital & Medical Center Dearborn, MI



“You Make a Difference”

Like most businesses in Dearborn, Michigan, Oakwood Hospital & Medical Center has union representation. This requires a unique, three-way partnership between hospital administration, union representatives, and the employees.

The main Oakwood campus represents 632 total beds and over 1 million square feet over 10 floors. The 260-person Environmental Services (EVS) department is represented by American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). Crothall Healthcare began managing the department in 1998. One of the most important changes, which took time to effect, was cultural change. In late 2008, that change came: Alissa Bachnak became the new EVS Director at the same time Oakwood asked its CFO, Ron Britt, to oversee the department.

“RELATIONSHIPS ARE 90% OF SUCCESS”

The annual Gallup survey reported a mean satisfaction and engagement score for all Oakwood system employees of 4.00 on a scale of 1 to 5. For Oakwood EVS, it was 3.27. This lack of engagement was taking its toll in both performance and morale:

- Room turnaround was 118 minutes
- A high number of union grievances were being filed

According to Britt, the EVS department had this feeling that they were not important. The normal relationship between union and management was strained.

“It’s all about relationships,” Britt explained. “Relationships are a large part of the success in the workplace. Living Oakwood’s core values means that employees need to be treated with respect, otherwise they have less concern and focus on their jobs.”

Bachnak had already worked in the department, starting as a supervisor. She knew the people and knew where to look for changes. “I’d like to say the changes were complicated,” she said, “but really I just listened.”

For 23 years, EVS staff had been requesting their own break room. The new management got it done. Crothall donated a TV and DVD player, and Oakwood supplied the tables, chairs, and refrigerator.

Employee satisfaction scores for EVS are higher than almost every other hospital department.



Alissa Bachnak (front, center) and the Oakwood EVS management team.

"RECOGNITION, INVOLVEMENT, ENGAGEMENT"

The break room was a major symbolic change, and it was only the first. Recognition is an integral part of Crothall procedures, so new employee rewards were introduced:

- Monthly awards for hourly employees
- Employee-supplied "Tips of the week" with cafeteria gift certificates
- Weekly one-on-one time with the Director

Oakwood partnered with Crothall to make other fundamental changes:

- Crothall is now directly involved in the hiring process so they more effectively screen candidates.
- Crothall created a \$1000, 3-year scholarship for EVS employees (with a matching scholarship from Ron Britt and his wife).
- Crothall is mentoring employees to succeed into Operations Manager, Assistant Director, and Director roles.

When new equipment is purchased, Bachnak asks employees' opinions. Vendors provide trial units, and employee meetings are held to discuss what they liked best. "They had some really good insight about what would work better," Bachnak said, "and it's good to show that we're listening."

Listening to employees has even helped ease union worries. EVS is budgeted for 145 discharges a day, but they routinely clean 160 to 217. "That requires teamwork," Bachnak said. "It requires teamwork and flexibility," Bachnak said. When people are pulled from their regular routines, she explains the necessity. "If I don't explain why I have to do it, they may file a grievance and be unhappy for two weeks as they wait for the hearing." Engaging them in the process makes them happier in doing their jobs. Britt and Bachnak concur, "we want to create an environment where our employees feel good about their jobs and want to come to work."

"DO YOU HAVE BEST FRIEND AT WORK...?"

When Gallup took its 2008 survey two months after the management change, the overall satisfaction scores for EVS had already jumped up to 4.04. In 2009, satisfaction jumped again to 4.78, with engagement up to 4.51. In 2010, those numbers were 4.83 and 4.68, respectively.

Those results are higher than the Oakwood system averages, higher than their sister hospitals, and higher than any other department except the 12-person security team (which beat EVS by 0.01 points).

Oakwood EVS ranks highest on the questions that relate to their personal investment: the opportunity to do their best (4.83), knowing what is expected (4.93), and having a purpose (4.78). But new results show that employee recognition is having an impact: they care about me (4.67) and I have a best friend (4.60).

The new attitude has changed everything:

- Room turnaround dropped to 65 minutes for day shift and 90 minutes for off-shifts
- Press Ganey scores increased to 87% for courtesy, with some floors hitting 90%
- Union grievances dropped over 68% between 2007 and 2010
- Retention improved from 89% in 2009 to almost 92% in 2010

"One of the impressive pieces—and it continues to intrigue me," mused Keith Cottrell, Crothall's Regional Manager, "is that corrective actions actually *increased*. One would think accountability loosened, but that's a myth. The culture changed."

A banner hangs over the break room door that reads "You make a difference." That encouragement is the change that Crothall brought to that EVS department. "If they clean well, people get better," Bachnak said. "They get to make a difference in people's lives."