Creating and effectively leading a diverse and inclusive security team

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Ensuring diversity is not only the right thing to do; it strengthens your team and its relationships with the people it serves.

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It is critical now, more than ever, that your public safety/security force reflects the community it is serving, regardless of whether your department is a civilian security department or a certified police department. If patients, visitors, and staff cannot relate to or communicate effectively with your staff, they most likely will not trust your staff, and you are doomed to failure. You can achieve diversity in your department by hiring staff that vary in gender, race, age, sexuality, and ethnicity. It is also important to understand each of the four or five generations of staff in your workforce to communicate with and motivate them effectively.

In a presentation for ASIS International in December 2020, James Pogue, Ph.D., used a very good analogy: Diversity means being invited to the party; inclusion means being invited to dance at the party; and equity

means everyone at the party gets the same gifts.

A recent example of inequity occurred at the 2021 NCAA Men's and Women's basketball tournament. The men's tournament had lots of publicity, and the players stayed at a very nice hotel, had access to a large and extensive workout room, and received lots of other little perks. The women's tournament had little publicity, and the players stayed at a less expensive hotel and only had a set of dumbbells and yoga mats in their workout room. The inequity has been going on for years, but it became blatantly obvious to everyone, thanks to a brave female athlete who posted it on social media.

DIVERSITY'S VALUE

A diverse population of officers creates a safer environment and a stronger community because people in your facility are more likely to build relationships with others who are like them. Patients, staff, and visitors can better relate to the officers, which helps to build trust. When people form positive relationships with their public safety/ security department, they are more likely to report potential incidents of violence earlier, when intervention methods are more likely to be effective. Positive relationships with people in the hospital and the surrounding community also reduce the number of false perceptions as well as internal and external complaints of harassment and discrimination.

BARRIERS

There following barriers must be identified and removed to establish a diverse public safety/ security force:

- *False Perceptions.* These include that the security staff needs to consist of big burly men; that even with training, women will not be able to do take downs of people larger than them; and that most women have good natural empathy skills.

- *Lack of understanding and support from senior leadership.* The organization you work for must actively support the hiring, training, and retention of a diverse work force.

- *Hiring priorities that do not support diversity and inclusion.* You may have

to do targeted recruiting and hiring to achieve a diverse workforce.

- *Inadequate funding for the resources and training needed to create a culture of diversity and inclusion.* Such resources can include specialized training courses to help officers understand cultural differences and the issues faced by the LGBTQ community.

- *Unconscious bias:* This is the biggest barrier to overcome.

Bias is a prejudgment or assumption in favor or against a person or group. *Unconscious* biases are ones you are unaware of and that occur automatically. Unconscious assumptions are often made concerning a person's

  ✓ gender
  ✓ ability or disability
  ✓ sexuality
  ✓ race
  ✓ age
  ✓ body weight
  ✓ socioeconomics
  ✓ religion
  ✓ politics

Everyone has unconscious biases because no one is perfect. We are strongly influenced by our background and experiences. Starting from how you are raised as a child and throughout your adult life, you will have experiences that will affect you both consciously and unconsciously. This is how your biases are created. The first step in addressing your unconscious biases is to admit you have them. You must become aware of your biases so you can keep yourself from expressing them. If you do accidently offend somebody, immediately acknowledge your misstep and apologize. There is no perfect person or leader. A good leader will try to see things from other perspectives besides their own. They will build trust with their staff and community through open and honest communication with authenticity, empathy, passion, and logic.

EFFECTS OF THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT

Many hospitals and health systems are convening multidisciplinary committees to evaluate their patient-restraint data to see if there are any racial or ethnic disparities, just as many police departments across the country are reviewing their arrest data for

racial and ethnic disparities. Many hospitals are discovering that people of color are restrained more often than Caucasian patients are. Security directors should welcome this review and actively participate in analyzing the data to determine if conscious or unconscious biases are affecting patient-restraint decisions. The hospital should encourage staff to report any incidents of inappropriate bias or discriminatory behaviors by staff via the hospital compliance hotline, which should be a safe and nonretaliatory reporting system.

In addition, Press Ganey, which conducts patient-satisfaction surveys, recently announced that it is going to start focusing on diversity. It will be launching initiatives and establishing guidelines to support diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace.

MANAGING A GENERATIONALLY DIVERSE STAFF

As we noted above, a diverse and inclusive workforce includes having staff from multiple generations. Americans' life expectancy increased from 54 years in 1919 to 79 years in 2019, according to the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). Many Americans are working longer to support themselves in order to stretch out and extend their savings accounts. Age diversity provides significant advantages in the workforce; however, it also raisess some challenges.

To manage the challenges effectively, you will want to understand the general makeup and some common characteristics of each of the generations and gain a sense of how each may like to communicate. However, remember that individuals are unique; not everyone will behave in accordance with a generation's general profile. Below, are snapshots of four generations, mostly drawn from fuller descriptions published in a blog [1] by Jill Novak, PhD.

Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964). Grew up on television and rock and roll and lived through the hippie era. Many engaged in nonviolent protests. Generally optimistic, driven, and team oriented, although can be self-righteous and self-centered. Tend to be more positive about authority, hierarchical structures, and tradition. Have a strong desire to change common values for the good of

all. View technology and innovation as a learning process. Prefer face-to-face communications and e-mails and texts that are not too informal or loaded with abbreviations. Their activism is beginning to reemerge.

Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980). Many were "latch-key kids," going to an empty house after school. They grew up street smart but isolated and often had divorced or career-driven parents. Tend to be individualistic and entrepreneurial. Average seven career changes. Most grew up during the switchover from the paper age to the digital age. Tend to commit to themselves instead of a specific company. Unimpressed with authority. Want the opportunity to learn, explore, and contribute.

Generation Y, or Millennials (born between 1981 and 2000). The 9/11 and "echo boomers" generation. Nurtured by omnipresent parents. Received trophies for participation. Optimistic and focused. Generally respect authority. Expect instant gratification. Like to schedule everything. Have great expectations for themselves. Prefer electronic communications. Think they are special and want to be treated accordingly.

Generation Z (Boomlets) (born 2001 and after). Are expected to outnumber the baby boomer generation. In 2006, 49% of babies born in the United States were Hispanic. Savvy consumers who know what they want and how to get it. More than 4 million have cell phones. By 4–5 years old, they are less interested in toys and prefer digital activities. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, some questioned whether they would have in-person communications if they did not attend school.

To bridge any generational communications gaps, leaders need to know their people and communicate effectively. Good communication leads to increased team productivity and effectiveness.

RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES TO REACH DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION GOALS

The first step is to integrate your department's goals with the organization's diversity goals. It is always good to have your staff help to develop the department's goals, as this involvement usually leads to staff taking more own-

ership of the goals and having a greater commitment to them.

Have some of your officers attend career fairs to help recruit officers. Select officers that represent the professionalism and diversity of your department. Develop a nice display board to show off your department and all its capabilities and accomplishments. It is also good to have a few giveaway trinkets, like pens or magnets, that market your department.

Connect with local universities and colleges. They may have a criminal justice program through which you can establish an internship and have an intern assigned to your department. Offer to speak to their students about the healthcare security profession, as not all criminal justice students want to be police officers. It is also good to recruit from other professions and majors such as teachers, social workers, and psychology departments because, given good training, individuals with those backgrounds can become excellent healthcare security officers.

Another way to recruit officers is to do outreach in the community where your hospital is located. Have the local newspaper write an article to showcase your department or do a video about your department. Expand your external website to include a recruitment page. Encourage your staff to volunteer in the community to build relationships as well as recruit potential officers. It is also helpful to run advertisement in newspapers and social media that are followed by the people you want to reach.

Engage your human resources team in your quest to hire and retain a diverse and inclusive public safety/security department. Work with the team to:

- Develop a recruitment incentive program. Offer a referral bonus to staff who successfully recruit officers or offer a signing bonus.

- Develop a job-shadowing program for hospital staff from other departments who have an interest in hospital security and meet the job qualifications.

- Develop a video to showcase your department.

- Make sure to do thorough background checks on all potential officers. Consider psychiatric evaluations or tests to try to

avoid judgmental or racist individuals.

YOUR ROLE IN FOSTERING COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Good leaders set a positive example for their staff. The department leader must openly support the importance of and commitment to having a diverse security staff. The leader must market the department and its services to hospital leadership, so they understand security's value and see the department as a critical part of the healthcare team.

The security director should meet with all new departmental employees just before their official hiring to ensure the employees understand the job-performance expectations and the department's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Employees need to understand that they have a responsibility to help sustain a healthy and happy work environment by having zero tolerance for racism, hate, and homophobia. Inappropriate behavior by employees rarely occurs in front of supervision, so coworkers must help curb bad behavior by reporting it to super-

vision before it gets out of control and quickly becomes a cancer in your department.

Lastly, recognize your staff and your department for their achievements. Positive reinforcement is much more effective than negative reinforcement. Engage your officers in committees, special projects, and programs so that they will take some ownership in the services they are providing. A very effective approach is facility-wide patrolling that is sometimes called community-oriented policing or patrolling (COP), in which officers engage with various hospital departments to teach security awareness and crime prevention courses as well as verbal de-escalation.

There is also some specialized training you can provide your staff upon hire and annually to help them better understand and communicate with people who are different from them and to advance their job skills. Some of the training options available include:

- Safe Zone training focused on the LGBTQ community
- training in working with people who have mental health issues or disabilities

- training focused on the various cultures and ethnicities
- training to understand bias and unconscious bias
- training to develop conflict-management and problem-solving skills
- career-development training and educational opportunities to enhance staffs' advancement opportunities

SUMMARY

Having a well-trained, diverse, and inclusive public safety/security staff that reflects the internal and external community it serves can have many benefits:

- improved trust, communications, and relations with the communities it serves
- more realistic community perceptions of the department and its services
- increased support by the hospital community for public safety and security. For example, the hospital community would be more likely to support more funding for security verses opposing any funding increase.
- an eventual decrease in crime, as hospital employees build trust and a better understanding of the security services being provided, which should lead to more timely interactions and resolutions to security-related incidents (Initially, though, you may see an increase in crime reporting when some hospital employees change their attitudes after previously not reporting incidents due to lack of trust or confidence that follow-up action would be taken.)

Trust and good relations are especially important in a hospital setting, where people are highly emotional and anxious (and usually for good reasons). You want your public safety/security staff to be approachable, to look like they are part of the internal and external community they serve, and to always be ready to help patients, families, visitors, and staff.

Reference

1. Novak, J. The six living generations in America. (2014, May 8). *The Marketing Teacher*. https://www.marketingteacher.com/the-six-living-generations-in-America/