



Case Study May 2010

Dishing Up Quality at Atlantic Health Sciences Corp.

NAME OF PROGRAM

SUCCESS

DATE ESTABLISHED

2000

SKILLS DEVELOPED

Fundamental skills
Personal management skills
Teamwork skills

CONTACT

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OVERVIEW

The Atlantic Health Sciences Corporation (AHSC) is New Brunswick's largest multi-facility accredited regional health authority. AHSC comprises 12 hospitals and health centres—extending across a 200-km area—which serve a catchment population of 200,000 in southwestern New Brunswick. AHSC offers a wide range of primary- through tertiary-level services.¹

The Department of Nutrition and Food Services at AHSC operates seven cafeterias in six facilities that serve over 3,000 customers daily. The facilities range from a small,

¹ Atlantic Health Sciences Corporation. "Welcome to the Atlantic Health Sciences Corporation" [online]. Website content. New Brunswick: Author [cited October 10, 2009]. www.ahsc.health.nb.ca/AboutUs/welcome.shtml.

isolated hospital with 12 beds to a regional hospital with 550 beds. Meal delivery styles in the facilities are tailored to customer expectations at each site.

In 1996, the Nutrition and Food Services Department underwent a major change from preparing food on-site to the use of an advanced meal service—one in which food is prepared by manufacturers off-site and heated and served on-site. However, corresponding worker orientation, communication skills training, and performance expectations around the new system were not provided. Customer service was not a priority for workers because they were too busy trying to adapt to the change in operations. The lack of training for their new job tasks led to customer service and performance issues. Staff members became uncomfortable with handling special requests from customers. Of greater concern, the safety of food preparation and handling was compromised, posing a threat to workers as well as customer health and safety.

SUCCESS focuses on developing five core competencies: customer service, food service, sanitation and safety, quality improvement, and other (including miscellaneous topics not covered under the other categories).

OBJECTIVES

AHSC aimed to design and implement a comprehensive performance management system to recruit the people best suited for the jobs and make use of competency-based training (incorporating both knowledge and on-the-job training). Clearly identified performance expectations would link to the corporation's values and strategic directions and would provide opportunities for ongoing development. Communication skills would also be improved through implementation of the system.

The resulting program is titled SUCCESS, an acronym representing each of the program's values: S for satisfaction, U for unbelievable service, C for comfort, C for consideration, E for empathy, S for support, and a final S for smile. Managers, supervisors, and workers collaborated

to identify the customer needs to be addressed by the SUCCESS program. The program is designed to provide:

- ♦ support for the company's most valued resource—its workers;
- ♦ flexibility for all operations, encompassing various job descriptions and tasks;
- ♦ current information needed by workers to perform their jobs;
- ♦ flexibility for use in group and one-on-one training and by outside staff;
- ♦ capacity to be adapted;
- ♦ documentation of training;
- ♦ resources to frontline staff in the event that a manager or supervisor is absent; and
- ♦ an easy-to-use e-learning format, recognizing that some staff have low literacy and computer skills.

TARGET GROUPS

New employees with the Nutrition and Food Services Department are required to complete certain SUCCESS training modules prior to taking part in other on-the-job training. The completion of the remaining modules depends on the facility to which employees are posted and their particular job requirements. For example, since a tray line is not used at all sites, the module on tray lines is completed only by staff working in facilities with tray lines. Staff members who transfer between sites complete any extra modules specifically required by their new worksite.

The SUCCESS program is designed to provide support for the company's valued resource—its workers.

ACTIVITIES

SUCCESS focuses on developing five core competencies: customer service, food service, sanitation and safety, quality improvement, and other (including miscellaneous topics not covered under the other categories). Each core competency is developed through a set of

training modules and a corresponding set of performance expectations. The training modules were tested in pilot projects before being implemented on a wide scale.

The training modules are divided as follows:

1. Customer Service—10 modules cover materials such as the department’s value statement, managing complaints, how to deal with a difficult customer, what is a respectful workplace, accountability, and how to deal with conflict.
2. Food Service—18 modules cover material including how to take food temperature, portion control, inventory, purchasing and storage of goods.
3. Sanitation and Safety—6 modules cover topics such as HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point)², food safety, and working safely.
4. Quality Improvement—2 modules focus on quality improvement and risk management topics.
5. Other—covers miscellaneous topics, such as cash handling and recognizing counterfeit money.

The development of the training modules provided the information necessary for the employee to understand the “why, what, and how” to do a great job.

—Beverley Ann Day, Manager, Training and Development for Support Services, AHSC

RESOURCES

AHSC provided the in-house design and development of the SUCCESS program. Workers had on-site access to e-learning training equipment and materials, including

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- 2 The Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point system is an internationally recognized means of assuring food safety from harvest to consumption. Recognized by Codex Alimentarius and other leading food safety agencies, HACCP has become the market standard for food safety worldwide. Food manufacturers and private label retailers are insisting that their suppliers and co-packers implement HACCP in their own facilities. (Guelph Food Technology Centre. www.gftc.ca/training/haccp/accredit.cfm).

a training journal and an employee handbook. Workers were allowed to complete the initial e-learning modules and then do the on-the-job training modules at work. Building training into a performance management system has enabled some of the training costs to be absorbed by everyday performance improvements.

INNOVATIONS

All new staff members receive a pocket-sized training journal that provides them with information regarding AHSC’s strategies, competencies to be developed by staff, and training completion dates. As workers develop their abilities and achieve their performance expectations, their supervisors or managers initial each journal. When workers are deemed competent and can meet performance expectations, they are rewarded with a certificate of achievement to recognize this accomplishment.

Building training into a performance management system has allowed some of the training costs to be absorbed by everyday performance improvements.

The AHSC has been working on a balanced scorecard approach to measuring its operations for the past several years. The SUCCESS program has facilitated the addition of data relating to customer expectations to this scorecard. Training initiatives and performance measures connect staff to the organization’s ongoing quality and safety benchmarking exercise. Practical, meaningful efforts to ensure continuous improvement are now possible due to the development of a more comprehensive set of organizational performance indicators.

CHALLENGES

The performance of a nutrition and food services operation is measured in several ways. One key measure is the absence of safety risks. Customers and patients need to be confident that their safety has not been compromised. A mistake in food handling could be devastating to customers who may have weakened immune systems or dietary restrictions.

The staff of the Nutrition and Food Services Department work in a unionized environment. Managers had found that some longer-term staff members were falling into the habit of performing poorly on critical work tasks. It was difficult to convince these staff members that they needed retraining, despite their years of experience. Grievances were threatened over the “reintroduction” of performance measures for staff in the new performance management system.

SOLUTIONS

In early 2000, the Nutrition and Food Services Department at AHSC designed and implemented a performance management system that uses competency-based training and defines performance expectations that link to AHSC’s values and strategic directions. Through the various system activities, staff members gain reading, computer, and communication skills that help improve their work performance and customer service.

Clear measures of work performance allow workers to see the results of their training as well as its application to their jobs and customer safety.

Food safety issues are addressed by means of training, and accountability is monitored through documentation. Staff members are educated on the critical importance of food safety, which includes the constant monitoring of food temperatures. All workers, regardless of their time with the organization or in their current job, are given training in food temperature monitoring procedures. A wealth of information on procedures and food safety issues is made available to workers in hard copy and online formats. Delivery of training via e-learning is interactive and easy for training participants to understand. Accountability of staff and managers is maintained through food temperature logs and other documentation. A new performance appraisal checklist was designed to link job descriptions with competencies and training.

OUTCOMES

The introduction of a performance management system has led to several positive outcomes. The organization’s culture continues to evolve and is better aligned with AHSC’s vision, mission, values, and strategy. Staff performance and customer service have improved in response to training and accountability processes. Employees demonstrate increased confidence and pride in their work because they better understand their work tasks. And the establishment of clear measures of work performance—such as safety risks—allows workers to see the results of their training as well as its application to their jobs and customer safety.

The focus on customer satisfaction has changed the working culture to make better use of observation skills.

The Nutrition and Food Services Department has seen a marked decrease in the number of grievances brought forward in its unionized environment. Communication skills improvements helped to enhance management–labour relations, while the new performance management system clarified many of the questions formerly posed by staff about performance expectations and measures.

IMPACTS AND BENEFITS

Training and new performance indicators have introduced staff to performance benchmarking and a balanced scorecard approach to business operations. The subsequent focus on customer satisfaction has changed the working culture to make better use of observation skills. Staff members now understand the cause-and-effect implications of their actions at work, resulting in improved performance of work tasks and safer food handling. Customer feedback has improved as well as customer perception of the Nutrition and Food Services Department.

In addition, the emphasis on staff training and development has resulted in improved staff retention and reduced staff absences due to illness. Attitudes of workers toward performance evaluation have also improved—they now view performance appraisals as development tools rather than as inefficient chores. Improved documentation has resulted in enhanced job performance according to the indicators set and, consequently, improved food safety.

USE AS A MODEL

SUCCESS can be used as a performance management model for any business. In AHSC, SUCCESS is being adapted into other departments, including pharmacy, admitting, infection protection and control, nursing, and other support service departments. The linkage involving job descriptions, training requirements, and performance expectations meets managers' and workers' needs and is adaptable to changing departmental requirements.

About the Organizational Effectiveness and Learning Case Studies

The Organizational Effectiveness and Learning case studies examine outstanding education and lifelong learning programs and initiatives. This case study addresses the impact of workplace literacy and essential skills on workplace health and safety.

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Dishing Up Quality at Atlantic Health Sciences Corp.

by *Alison Campbell*

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