Solution

What...

Standards are agreed upon or established means of determining what something should be. To achieve standards involves intentional and deliberate efforts by everyone in the organization. Over time, these efforts become more natural or unconscious (e.g., "this is how we do it around here.").

Standards can help to shape:

▶ how we behave toward each other, patients, and visitors (e.g., standards of behavior)
▶ how we communicate (e.g., positive communication standards)
▶ how we complete our work (e.g., policies, procedures, standard work)
▶ how our leaders lead (e.g., Leadership Bundle)

Why...

Research supports that when organizations clearly define high standards, people feel more valued and engaged, and that leads to better outcomes for patients, employees, and our organization.

How...

To deliver on our organization's promise of excellence requires us to always be taking steps to define, teach, role model - and achieve - our high standards.

A 5-Step Plan to Achieving Standards

▶ STEP 1 - Empower and equip employee-driven team(s) and all leaders
▶ STEP 2 - Establish the standards
▶ STEP 3 - Introduce the standards
▶ STEP 4 - Promote ongoing diffusion
▶ STEP 5 - Study and adjust

STEP 1 - Empower and equip employee-driven team(s) and all leaders

Achieving high standards can be hard, yet very worthwhile work. It's most successful when the efforts involve the people whose work or conduct will be guided by the standards, such as our standards of behavior or positive communication standards being defined or updated by a group of employees.

Employee-driven teams can be empowered to be part of steps 2-5 outlined below. Yet even with the empowerment of a very active and successful employee-driven effort, leaders must also know and fulfill their specific roles in these steps as well.

Given that the steps below are intended to guide a continual process of achieving standards, it is advised that "forever team(s)" (e.g., versus ad hoc "one and done" team(s), are empowered to own the responsibility for these outlined steps year-after-year, for specific standards. For instance, an Employee Experience Team exists long team to own the organization's efforts to achieve their Standards of Behavior, and a Patient Experience Team does the same for the Positive Communication Standards.

When it comes to the role of leaders, they will support the efforts of these employee-driven teams (e.g., "grab the baton"); as well, they may serve as a facilitator of one of these teams, serve on a team of leaders that set and strive for the leadership standards defined in the Leadership Bundle, or serve as an internal/peer champion for one or more of the leadership standards.

STEP 2 - Establish the standards

It may be challenging to define the organization's various standards, or sets of standards, in the beginning, or to keep raising or revising them as our organization evolves, yet when we set standards that are both high and clear, people immediately begin to raise their expectations of what's possible and start to stretch to reach them.

Recommended sets, or bundles, of standards to be adopted organization-wide are as follows:

- ▶ Standards of Behavior (see separate SOLUTION) - how we behave toward each other, patients, and visitors
- ▶ Positive Communication Standards (see 12 separate SOLUTIONS) - how we communicate with each other and patients/family/visitors
- ▶ The Leadership Bundle (see 9 separate SOLUTIONS) – how our leaders lead

NOTE: Most standards for how we complete our specific work (e.g., policies, procedures, standard work, essential job functions, etc.) are often job- and/or department-specific and therefore are often not championed by an organization-wide employee-driven team. The department leader(s) are still well advised to engage impacted employees when setting or revising work-related standards.

Tips for creating standards:

▶ Standards should be simply stated and as specific as possible in order to set people up for success in understanding and upholding the standards. Clarity helps to overcome some of the barriers to achieving standards.

▶ Some standards will seem "too common sense" to commit to writing in your standards; however, most often, it is those common sense standards that are often not commonly or consistently practiced by everyone in the organization (e.g., "hi in the hallway"). Don't avoid including "common sense" or simply standards that are known to have positive impacts when practiced consistently by everyone.

▶ You may want to get examples from other organizations or outside experts; however, it is still important to "make them yours" by customizing to your organization's challenges, opportunities, and culture.

▶ Standards define how we do want employees, leaders and physicians/providers to behave or perform. Works Rules define how we do not want those groups of people to behave or perform. In other words, standards are written in the positive, while a work rule is usually written in the negative.

▶ Do not create a standard for something that people will not be held accountable to. It is better to have no standard defined than to have a written standard that isn't upheld.

▶ An organization's specific set(s) or bundle(s) of standard could be referenced, labeled, or branded with another name (e.g., "Vernon Virtues" "I-CARE Standards, DRIVE Standards) and a symbol/logo may be created that represents and brands the standards.

STEP 3 - Introduce the standards

When standards are new, or revised, they need to be introduced to the workforce. This initial introduction to the new or revised standards is best spearheaded by the team that was empowered to develop or revise the standards (possibly with the support of an Employee Training and Communication Team for employee-related standards and/or Steering Team for employee- and/or leader-related standards).

Organization-wide training, whether in-person or virtual, will focus on the "what, why, and how" of the standards. As well, when standards are newly introduced (or

at various intervals or when major revisions are made), the organization may want to expand their training event to include a "commitment" component. This commitment element offers an opportunity for individuals – and collectively everyone – to demonstrate their willingness to strive to uphold the standards.

COMMITMENT TIPS

► An organization-wide commitment event is a celebration that signifies that "it is a new day" in the organization, a future of everyone striving to uphold high standards

► A commitment event often has some sort of "symbolic" show of commitment, maybe the signing of a banner, the receiving of a pin or special name badge, etc. that remains after the event is over.

► An organization-wide re-commitment event may be desired when major revisions are made to the standards or at specific intervals (every 3 or so years).

► Targeted standards can be part of a department-specific commitment event if a department is struggling with specific standards.

► New employee orientation can also include a commitment-type event for a group of new hires; or individual applicants can be required to commit to the standards prior to being offered an interview.

► The standards could become part of union contract(s), if applicable, and when union members ratify/sign a new agreement, it signifies commitment to the incorporated standards.

► As part of the annual employee evaluation/appraisal process each year, a self-assessment and leader-assessment of behaviors prior to their annual evaluation, and then the leaders have an opportunity to discuss and set goals with employees on their behaviors, as well as indicate re-commitment to the standards.

► Physician/provider re-commitment to standards could also be included as part of the re-privileging process in organizations that have such a process.

The Role of Leaders

After organization-wide employee standards are introduced (and committed to) though an organization-wide training and/or commitment effort, individual leaders can "localize" and "personalize" the use of the standards by "grabbing the baton" in follow up to the training/event by engaging employees in individual or group discussions at huddles, staff meeting, and/or during rounding sessions regarding how best to apply the standards in the specific department or job.

Actions that leaders can take to help "bring and keep standards alive" (useful in Steps 3, 4, and 5) are more specifically defined on the final page of this SOLUTION.

STEP 4 - Promote ongoing diffusion

Once training and commitment efforts have been completed, the efforts to achieve high standards is truly just beginning. The efforts in Steps 1, 2 and 3 alone don't magically transform the behaviors and actions of everyone.

Diffusion, or spread, of the standards into the organization requires ongoing efforts.

> **Adoption** is an individual process detailing the series of stages one undergoes from first hearing about an innovation, standard, or change to finally adopting it.

> **Diffusion** is defined as the process in which an innovation, standard, or change is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system. Diffusion signifies a group phenomenon, which suggests how an innovation, standard, or change spreads.

Campaigns or "Top of Mind" Tactics

Campaigns are a very useful tactic to promote diffusion. Campaigns can be used by the team(s) at an organization-wide level and/or by individual leaders at a department-specific level. Campaigns are frequent, fun, creative reminders - such as providing visual cues on flyers or whiteboards - or standards-related recognition at daily huddles or scenarios at staff meetings. (See the separate SOLUTION on Campaigns).

Validation-Feedback Loop

The **"Validation-Feedback Loop"** is the practice of observing or inquiring about the standards – with a spirit of curiosity, not criticism. Then, in response to what is learned, providing specific feedback. Most frequently, this feedback would be provided in-the-moment, such as giving a compliment after observing a situation where standards were met, or improvement was noticed – or a call out, if the standard was not met or could be improved upon.

This is often "the work of leaders" – however, all employees can learn to effectively utilize the validation-feedback loop (aka, peer-to-peer feedback or accountability).

STEP 5 - Study and adjust

From time-to-time, possibly once a year or so, the employee-driven team can circle back to certain standards, or a whole set or bundle of standards, to formally study (aka evaluate, validate) the consistency of use of the standards and the impact that the standards are having.

These study efforts can be guided by the Validation SOLUTION (4 Ways to Validate).

In follow up to the study, actions can be determined that may include:

▶ adjusting the standards, or

▶ adjusting the efforts to achieve the standards.

It is often noted during the study efforts that there are "pockets" of success within the organization, which can be understood and can serve useful to include in storytelling and training to equip and inspire others to adopt the standards.

As well, the study may also show "pockets" of struggles or lack of diffusion (e.g., in a certain shift or department or job). Again, this information is useful in the continual efforts to achieve the standards.

► **Grateful Leadership & Giving and Receiving Feedback:** Leaders ongoingly recognize employees for upholding the standards. What is recognized gets repeated. The focus is to bring the standards "alive" in a positive way in the culture. The "Compliments to Correction Ratio" of 3:1 is a guide to being mindful in providing three times more recognition ("compliments") than correction ("call-outs"). Encourage and mentor "omni-directional" feedback, meaning that everyone is able to give and receive feedback (compliments and call outs, "I noticed = I care") guided by the 3:1 ratio.

► **Communication.** Incorporate communication and discussions about chosen standards in huddles, staff meetings, and on communication boards. Focus on communicating WHAT the standard is and WHY it is important.

► **Rounding.** Ask a custom question(s) during rounding that focuses on standards. Who should I recognize for role modeling the standards, and why? Which standard should be the focus of our staff meeting next month, and why? Tell me about a time recently when you recognized someone for adhering to the standards? Tell me about a time recently when you called someone out for not adhering to a standard?

► **Effective Hiring & Onboarding.** Utilize behavior-based interview question, focusing on the most important standard-related behaviors or actions desired/needed on the team. When developing/revising department-specific orientation, emphasize organization-wide standards as well as job task performance standards.

► **Setting & Achieving Goals.** Achieving standards can positively impact safety and quality, patient satisfaction, and employee satisfaction and engagement. Consider standards when selecting annual department goals and creating goal action plans. Is teamwork behavior identified as an opportunity to improve on your department's employee survey? Is staff friendliness identified as an opportunity to improve on your patient survey? These are example of possible standards-based annual goals. For any action plan for any goal, consider: What standards, if adhered to more consistently by more people, would help us meet our goal?

► **Giving & Receiving Feedback.** The annual performance appraisal/commitment process is one method for checking in on what behaviors or actions are consistently demonstrated in keeping with the standards, and which ones are the target of ongoing efforts to improve.

► **Leading Change.** The Validation-Feedback Loop (see SOLUTIONS on 4 Ways to Validate and Giving and Receiving Feedback) is a powerful tactic for leaders to master.