

SOLUTION: Employee Suggestion Programs



GOT IDEAS? YOUR EMPLOYEES DO!

Employee Suggestion Programs (ESP's) are nothing new. They have been around for a long time. However, we still see organizations that have not harnessed the powerful energy of listening to their employees working on the frontline where problems occur to find solutions.

THE WHY BEHIND DEVELOPING AN ESP

Appreciated and Heard! Feeling as though they are underappreciated and not listened to is the number one reason that employees leave their department or their organization. 65% of turnover is caused by this! Your team can create a process to make it easy for employees to feel appreciated and heard with an ESP. YOU can prevent someone from leaving their job and help reduce the amount of costly turnover happening in your organization.

Employees get frustrated when problems do not get solved in their work. They see barriers all around them, and they are challenged with changes being put in place without asking the very people who do a job what their thoughts are.

Yet, their perception is that leaders **know** about problems. Their perception is that leaders can surely **see** the problems and barriers. Leaders do not do their jobs in the same way a frontline employee does. They are not present 24/7 to see what crops up in the off hours and weekends.

So, problems do not get solved, and frustration mounts until an employee leaves, or a patient safety event occurs.

Many solutions lead to employees feeling appreciated and heard in their work environment.

An employee suggestion program is one way that a team of front-line employees can make a great difference in the efficient operations of their organization AND save turnover from happening!



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CASE

Copy **A**nd **S**teal **E**verything (but make it yours and make it better). Capstone has examples of ESP's that have worked in other partner organizations. Steal away! We know this - our employee driven teams are BEST at taking an idea and making it unique to the needs and culture of your organization. (see **Tools for Employee Suggestion Programs**)

WHAT TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GET STARTED:

CEO and Senior Leader Support – The voice of the CEO is vital to the success of your ESP. Nothing says “This is important” like having your CEO talk about the ESP program you are developing or have developed. Request that your CEO discuss the program at department head meetings, as a topic at the CEO Employee Forums, and in his or her written communication to all employees. We have some partner organizations where the CEO personally responds to all employee suggestions and provides a promise that someone will listen and follow up. We want your ESP to be so successful your CEO does not have time to personally respond to all the great ideas!

Have a plan – A successful ESP has a plan. We suggest you use PDSA (Plan-Do-Study-Adjust) to improve the process of gathering employee ideas and suggestions just as other improvements you make across your organization. A downloadable template to create your plan is attached to this solution. (see the High Reliability Team **Tool for PDSA**)

Make sure your system gains traction without daily work by YOU – (in other words, no BOX). Even though most early ESP's were created successfully with paper, pens, and a suggestion BOX, we do not suggest this for you. It may seem to be the easiest route to begin but consider this: Someone has to gather the suggestions out of the box. One box isn't enough, you need them many places to make it easy for employees to make suggestions. AND.... boxes gather other, less desirable items that someone with a bad attitude placed in the box. An electronic and easily accessible ESP does so much of the work FOR YOU. A suggestion can have an automatic response to the employee, promising that their suggestion will be looked at by your team, and they can expect a response in 30 days time. Electronic ESP's are easy, and they can be located on an icon in every computer in your organization. You can also build a tracking system to make sure that the details on your ESP do not get pushed to a corner of someone's desk and forgotten like paper does.



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Make sure you Study/Adjust – Part of the PDSA process is very important when it comes to an employee driven team like yours putting a project/process in place for employees and leaders alike. You need to do a Study-Adjust of your ESP one quarter (60-90 days) after you put the program in place to ask questions like “What did we forget? Who did we forget? What gaps and cracks are in our plan where we may lose great ideas?” Declining to do a study adjust on an ESP is the epitome of not listening to your frontline employees!

Monitoring Metrics – What defines success in your program? Will it be the number of suggestions you get over time? Will it be actual ideas that you turn into improvements? Will it be the many thanks that you get from employees who know they are being listened to and valued for their thoughts and ideas? We suggest a combination of all of the above!

Define the success of your program through monitoring your employee engagement survey. Your HR leader and steering team can assist you with the questions on the survey that most speak to an ESP. Desired on a survey are high scores on:

“I am listened to”
“Communication from the top down is great here”
“My ideas for change or improvements are valued”

Make a team goal to improve one or more of the survey questions, and your action plan is a great ESP!

Require Ideas/Solutions – Your suggestions have to be more than a sentence, or a way for an employee to submit a RANT. If you do an online ESP, you can require a sentence or two (or more) of a solution to the problem the employee has identified.

Secret Sauce – Follow Up is the secret sauce to a great ESP! You need to develop a way to follow up with EACH suggestion, no matter what. Electronically, you can have a canned message of what the employee can expect from your process. That is a great start. Then, if you promise them a reply within 30 days, make sure it happens!

Don't Let the details fall between the cracks – Many ESP's push the employee's suggestions out to the applicable department leader where the suggestion happened or where change needs to take place. It is still the team's job to follow up with that leader to make sure they put the suggestion in place, or at least got back to the employee with a timeline and answer. If you feel better with the EE team responding to all suggestions, do it! You just may need to chase leaders around for that answer- be patient! It will be worth it.



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Minds over Money: Don't pay for ideas! Whenever you add money, or payment to your ESP, you create a whole new level of problems and barriers to great ideas coming to you. Engaged employees will give you their ideas for free! They want work to be better, they want their ideas to be heard. You don't have to provide cash for suggestions, and when you do the research is clear- it creates unhealthy work behaviors of blame and competition you don't want.

On the other hand, not all ideas save money – Some of them cost money. In fact, one of the reasons we suggest that there be a leader as liaison for your program (or the leader of your team) is to make sure that appropriate channels are followed when it comes to the expense of an ESP, and great suggestions.

This is a really valuable tool for employees to learn about the healthcare finance world. The employee experience team will learn about cost justifying a new program, or piece of equipment. They will learn the WHY behind leadership decisions when it comes to cash flow and finances.

Yes If vs. No Because – The goal is fresh ideas and possibly another way to do something. It's important to develop a great way to respond to great ideas and suggestions. The whole purpose of your program is to gather great ideas, make people feel appreciated and heard, and to create a better work environment. In your response to ideas you cannot put in place, create a "Yes, if..." vs. "No, because..." response. Sometimes the answer is no.

Sometimes, ideas (usually the ones that cost money) have to be placed in a different budgeting year. Sometimes, they have to be passed off to other organizations for assistance with the idea. Make sure that employees are always celebrated and thanked for their ideas regardless if they can happen immediately. People just want an answer - even if the answer is no. Placing emphasis on the positive "Yes, if" makes a no easier to handle!

Brand it! Market it! When you have your plan developed it's time to sell it! Branding is a marketing term that means your ESP is easily identifiable to the employees and is "known" to stand for a reliable voice throughout your organization. It becomes a talking point in conversations and a solution to barriers and problems when discussed by employees. Some names of programs we have seen are "Bright ideas", "Great Ideas", "A Piece of Mind" (looks like a puzzle piece).

A great way to brand your ESP is to have the identifiable symbol be present on all of the improvements and changes you have made as a result of your program. This cannot be done with every suggestion you take, but some quick and easy wins create excitement and are the best marketing tool for your ESP. An example of this: An employee at Eaton Rapids Medical Center suggested there be a clock put in their main meeting room where employees meet and attended training. This organization discourages cell phone use during meetings, so employees were late getting back to their departments without a way to tell time in the room! When the



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team made sure a clock was purchased and installed, they placed their symbol (a puzzle piece) near the clock to proudly exclaim the clock was there because an employee participated in their ESP.



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OTHER WAYS TO GATHER GREAT IDEAS!

- **Ask at your CEO Forums.** Your employees can give you great ideas on problems that the organization is CURRENTLY trying to solve. An example is when our organization was having some financial problems. Our CEO, David - asked the employees at his CEO forum to help him. The EE team had passed out small forms employees could fill out that simply said “We need your help! What do you see we could save money on?” David was able to save thousands of dollars in one year with what we referred to as “low hanging fruit”. Things employees saw that senior leaders could never have seen were taken into consideration and improvement made! All because of the voice of the CEO asking his employees for help!
- **30/90 day New Employee Interviews.** We recommend that the question “In your prior place of employment what did they do really well you think we could implement here?” be asked by all leaders of new employees within 90 days of hire. If this has not been implemented in your organization, the EE team could ask the new employees! New people have great ideas!
- **New Hire/New Physician Orientation.** Make sure the ESP you develop is rolled out to all new hires. Again, they will have great ideas, and they need to know where to go with the improvements they see.

CALL TO ACTION – JUST START.

You are the employee’s voice for your organization, and sometimes even a highly motivated group of employees like yourselves cannot see all things that need to be improved in the way employees work and patients receive care.



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