

## **STAR—How This Free Tool is Helping Two Programs**

*Research has shown that employees who have higher job satisfaction care about the quality of their work, have higher retention rates, are more productive, and are more committed to their organizations. But how do you really know if your staff is satisfied? And wouldn't it help to see how your organization compares with other hospice and palliative care providers? Enter STAR.*

*The Survey of Team Attitudes and Relationships is a hospice-specific, staff-satisfaction survey that is available—free of charge—to NHPCO members. Here, two members who have used STAR provide some feedback on their experience. (For details about accessing STAR, see page 30)*



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## Blue Ridge Hospice on Using STAR

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*By Ernest J. Carnevale, Jr., FACHE*

Some of my favorite T-shirts are from the company, Life is good.<sup>®</sup> These popular shirts are the trademark of a business whose simple message of optimism has become a national brand. What has interested me most is a small cloth tab on the bottom of every shirt that says “Do What You Like and Like What You Do.”

In the perfect world of leading hospice organizations, a CEO’s dream is to have all of his/her employees doing what they like and liking what they do—the epitome of ultimate job satisfaction. This begs the question, how do organizations achieve and maintain this level of job satisfaction?

### **Measure, Evaluate and Communicate**

The best place to start is to survey your employees by measuring their level of job satisfaction, to benchmark your employee satisfaction ratings with other hospices, and to actively use the results to make your organization the best place to work.

NHPCO’s Survey of Team Attitudes and Relationships (STAR), which is available as a free benefit to all members, has provided Blue Ridge Hospice with valuable employee satisfaction information. The STAR is a snapshot in time, no different than a financial balance sheet. It takes the temperature of any organization’s culture.

### **Setting the Stage**

Blue Ridge Hospice is a not-for-profit organization that serves more than 200 patients a day and employs more than 190 staff. Located in Winchester, Virginia, it covers a geographic region of 150 miles. With the support of senior management, we were able to have nearly 190 employees (i.e., 98%) complete the STAR as a project organized through our human resources department. The staff’s reaction to the survey was very positive, as demonstrated by the high return rate. The survey is easily accessed on the NHPCO Web site and we allowed employees paid-time to complete it.

The survey results provided us with information in five areas, demonstrating that 95 percent of the time employees agree with the following statements:

- I have the right skills to do my job
- I have a good working relationship with my team members
- My organization’s primary focus is attending to patients’ and families’ needs
- Other people in the organization are willing to help me when I need it
- I am often overwhelmed by the paperwork I have to do

A recent study of key sources of satisfaction in healthcare managers (Buchbinder and Thompson, 2010, p. 76) lists the following as the top sources of satisfaction:

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- Being a productive member of a team
- The ability to learn and grow in my work
- Helping people and populations through my organization
- The ability to achieve my goals, and
- The significance of my work

These five top sources of job satisfaction not only correlate with the STAR survey results, they also speak to the unique nature of hospice care. Helping people and being a productive team member are but two strong tenets of the mission of a quality hospice program.

### The Dialogue Begins

At Blue Ridge Hospice, we began the dialogue concerning our STAR results with members of the senior management team. Reviewing satisfaction results among department heads helped to identify opportunities from the survey tool—that is, what are the higher sources of job satisfaction and how can they become stronger? Where are we seeing the greatest dissatisfaction?

For example, with staff overwhelmed with paperwork, how will our introduction of a new paperless electronic medical record system affect overall job satisfaction? Will the introduction of laptops in the field increase or decrease overall job satisfaction? In our case, the introduction of these new tools of technology will be evaluated in next year's STAR.

The next conversations addressed the STAR results within each department, among all staff members. These meetings provided

opportunity to review the results and discuss where and how opportunities for change could occur. Sometimes making instant changes are possible whereas changes in wages or benefits that are closely tied to annual budgeted revenues and expenses are not.

The STAR has provided a great opportunity to develop new goals and objectives to achieve greater staff satisfaction and, in many ways, results from the survey echo how much the hospice model of care lends itself to teamwork. They point to how much people who are attracted to hospice work like interacting in teams, enjoy working with colleagues, and benefit from each other's respect and trust.

### Building on the Results

How does one build on the STAR results? Having been a student of healthcare management for the last 30 years, attending conferences of well-known speakers, and reading various books on management, I have developed a hybrid management style—selecting some of the best of the “best techniques” to build and maintain a satisfied workforce.

In Jim Collins book, *Good to Great*, he talks about having the right people in the right seat on the bus; that metaphor continues to ring true. You want people to like what they do and do what they like. Finding the right job, the right fit, and sometimes the right supervisor can provide good results.

I also learned the value of four words—trust, respect, joy, and pride—after attending a conference with Tom Atchison, a noted

speaker and author on healthcare leadership. These four words and their importance to the mission of Blue Ridge Hospice are discussed in detail at all new employee orientations, as well as at every staff meeting. Simple questions are posed:

**Trust:**

Do you trust and do you feel trusted by your peers, by your supervisors, by your patients?

Do you trust yourself to make the right decisions each and every day, and do you trust that if you make a mistake you will be supported by your supervisor, and provided opportunities to learn from that mistake?

**Respect:**

Do you respect your patients, and do you respect your peers and your coworkers? Do you feel respected by your peers, your supervisor, and your patients?

**Joy:**

Do you find joy in what you do and do you portray that joy in your actions to your coworkers, to your peers, and especially to patients and their families?

**Pride:**

Are you proud of your work with patients and families?

Are you proud to be working for this organization?

Are you going to leave this organization a better place than you found it at the end of the day?

I firmly believe these building blocks, instilled in new employees and in the culture of the organization, provide the foundation for greater employee satisfaction.

Perfection is not the key here. Patience and opportunity, the instantaneous ability to recognize teachable moments, continued praise of good employee behavior, and continual positive feedback—these are the necessary tools to create a satisfied workforce. ↙

*The author extends special thanks to Linda Roberts and Sharie McVicker for their assistance with this article (and for doing what they like and liking what they do!).*

*Ernest J. (Ernie) Carnevale Jr. is completing his 10th year as president/CEO of Blue Ridge Hospice (Winchester, VA), and also serves as an adjunct professor in Health Care Management at Shenandoah University. With 30 years of experience in the healthcare field, Ernie has used his experience to consult with various healthcare organizations and physician practices regarding healthcare management issues.*

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## Treasure Coast Hospice on Using STAR

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**By Martha Lasseter, CHC, and Joan Latowski LPN, CHPLN**

Treasure Coast Hospice (TCH) is a mission-driven, not-for-profit hospice that realizes the importance of staff feedback. We have experienced rapid growth in the last three years (doubling our census to over 600 patients), and currently employ 500 full-time, part-time and per diem staff. In being located in a competitive healthcare employment market in Stuart, Florida, we also know that what our staff thinks and feels are critical to our success.

TCH has conducted annual in-house staff surveys before, but NHPCO's Survey of Team Attitudes and Relationships (STAR) has afforded our staff the chance to participate in a national level, hospice-specific survey, along with other programs, and has provided us with valuable comparative data.

### **Making the Process Fun—with an Online Drawing**

TCH has used The STAR since 2008. Our annual submission period runs from October 16 through October 31. Following step-by-step instructions, staff members can access the survey's web page from home or work, and plug in their member number and password to get started. If some staff members are unable to complete the survey at one sitting, they are able to return and complete it later.

While NHPCO makes the survey process easy and user-friendly, TCH's CEO, Dr. Louis Benson, and members of our Service Excellence Committee devised a plan to offer prizes and department incentives to encourage participation—but also to make the survey process positive and engaging.

A grid was created, containing the numbers 1 through 500 (for each of our 500 paid staff) and prizes are randomly assigned to certain numbers. As each staff member completes the survey, he/she can enter a number into the drawing. The same number cannot be selected by multiple staff—so the first staff to complete the survey gets first dibs at choosing a winning number. At the end of the submission period, another drawing is held for a grand prize.

Each TCH employee who has completed the survey receives two movie tickets. Prizes from the drawing include gift cards for gasoline, groceries, and local restaurants and retailers in addition to the grand prize (which, in 2008, was a weekend getaway for four at a nearby beach resort). To encourage some friendly competition, discount guest tickets to TCH's annual holiday party are also awarded to departments with 70, 80, 90, and 100 percent participation among staff.

### **Summary of Results**

The summary results from the STAR include interpretative and comparative guides that have been concise and easy to read. Best of all, our scores have been outstanding. In the few areas where scores have been below the national average, we have been able to institute corrective action to address the concerns which employees noted. Most importantly, we have shared the results with our staff members, so they know their opinion matters and that we listen. ↙

*Martha Lasseter is vice president of compliance for Treasure Coast Hospice (Stuart, FL). She has over 25 years of experience in the healthcare field and is certified in healthcare compliance (CHC), and as a hospice and palliative care administrator. She also serves on NHPCO's Quality & Standards Committee.*

*Joan Latowski is the quality improvement nurse/coordinator for Treasure Coast Hospice and a certified hospice and palliative licensed practical nurse, with 30 years of experience in the healthcare field. Joan also serves on NHPCO's Quality & Standards Committee.*

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## About STAR

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The Survey of Team Attitudes and Relationships consists of 45 core questions, across six domains, and was designed to assess the satisfaction of your entire hospice staff—including administrative, clinical, and non-clinical employees.

### **Why Your Organization Should Participate**

- **It's Unique:** The STAR is the first and only job satisfaction survey designed specifically for the hospice field. Other healthcare industries have had specialized surveys for years; now the hospice industry has its own.
- **It's Paperless:** NHPCO provides online survey administration. Once you establish the survey starting and ending dates for your organization, staff can go online to complete the survey (there are no paper surveys to copy or collect).
- **It's Useful:** The administration and reporting process provides the information you need to make adjustments that can improve staff satisfaction and retention. Employees are the heart of hospice—your individual STAR report will give you insight on how to keep your staff happy.
- **It's FREE:** Online administration and a real-time report with responses for your hospice are offered to NHPCO members free of charge—as an exclusive benefit of membership.

### **To Learn More**

Participation is fairly straightforward and outlined in the PDF, "Guidelines for Administrators," that is posted on the NHPCO Web site ([www.nhpc.org/star](http://www.nhpc.org/star)). You'll also find instructions for staff, along with helpful FAQs.