



A New Home and a New Start for Ontario Health Providers



Case Study

North Bay General Hospital and North East Mental Health Centre were two distinct organizations with different cultures—could they keep employees engaged during their merger?

The Challenge: Coming Together Without Coming Apart

It was time for a change. Both of the facilities for North East Mental Health Centre (NEMHC), the largest mental health service provider in northeastern Ontario, and North Bay General Hospital (NBGH), a district referral centre serving northeastern Ontario, were aging and needed new homes. The Ministry of Health and Long Term Care decided to build one new facility that would house both entities.

While this seemed a simple and common-sense approach, the reality was much more complex. NEMHC has a long patient lifecycle, which involves an exploration process and a slower pace. NBGH, on the other hand, is focused on acute care, which has a relatively short patient life cycle and often requires quick decision-making. The general hospital has greater visibility in the community, whereas the smaller mental health centre's identity can get lost within the region. Even the two dress codes are quite different.

Customer

North Bay General Hospital and North East Mental Health Centre

Industry

Healthcare

Business Solution

- The Five Drivers of Engagement™
- Pull Conversation™ 1.0, 2.0
- Emotional Intelligence training

Business Challenges

- Underperformers not held accountable
- Lack of recognition/appreciation
- Job uncertainty due to merger
- Lack of clarity/inadequate communication
- Merging of two organizational cultures

Business Benefits

- Improved communication at all levels
- Improved collaboration
- Improved respect between organizations
- Greater understanding and empathy between organizations



Then another wrinkle appeared. The Ministry had originally intended to keep both entities distinct but living under the same roof. However, each Board of Directors separately came to the same conclusion: it would be best to merge into one entity to take advantage of the synergies of one facility and keep costs down. This would mean saying good-bye to two trusted and respected chief executive officers and bringing in one new chief executive officer (CEO).

So, in addition to the already-challenging circumstances of two cultures moving into one facility, now came the ambiguity of an unknown CEO and an unclear organizational structure. It was clear that help would be needed during this transition to formally create a new, united culture and to build the conversation skills of managers to solidify employee engagement through the changeover and beyond. They needed to learn how to present one face to the public.

“We wondered, ‘How do we engage employees through the transition and create new expectations?’” says Mark Hurst, chief executive officer of NBGH. “How do we prepare them for culture shock?”

The Solution: Communication Builds Community

The two organizations were already looking at ways that they could incorporate engagement and conversation strategies and skills into their frontline leadership but felt they could benefit from outside, expert assistance. NEMHC staff researched several consulting companies, and when it came down to a choice, their Director of Human Resources and Engagement was very clearly in favour of Juice. He had spent significant time talking to several firms, and he really clicked with the Juice approach. Juice’s presentation to the combined senior staff highlighted the firm’s strengths and the ability of their staff to react well to questions and to unexpected requirements. “As the senior staff started to work with Juice, we got an immediate boost in communication of concerns held by members of both teams that had been difficult to talk about openly,” says Bob Cunningham, chief executive officer of NEMHC. While they didn’t resolve the concerns and misunderstandings right away, the process started them on a more open path.





“The type of engagement and messaging being promoted showed us that Juice was the right choice,” Hurst said. “Some companies make you wade through the complexities before you can understand what they’re about and what they do. Juice’s information was intuitive—simple but not simplistic.”

Juice used survey data from both organizations to find out where everyone stood in terms of engagement, commitment and other factors that are key to organizational health. Juice also facilitated focus groups to gain insight into how employees were feeling about their jobs, their leaders and their future.

Juice discovered that both entities showed strong signs of health in several areas. For example, 72 percent of employees were satisfied with their managers, intent to remain was high, and there was genuine excitement about the merger and a desire to make it work.

But the merging organizations needed to focus on certain key issues if they wanted to keep employees engaged during this time of uncertainty and create a unified culture that valued the two entities’ distinctives. Some employees were dissatisfied with senior leadership, and most felt that there was not enough accountability for poor performance and not enough recognition for what people did well. Additionally, NEMHC feared being “swallowed up” by the larger organization.

Juice laid out the “story” the data was telling them and from it created strategies that leaders could use to guide their employees into a new, unified group. One strategy was for members of each organization to meet informally and learn about each others’ culture. Another was for both CEOs to start communicating together, via newsletter articles and town hall meetings, to underscore unity. Juice recommended that leaders communicate openly with employees about their expectations and fears, encouraging them to engage in behaviours like assuming positive intent and giving people the benefit of the doubt. Leaders would also need to allow and facilitate the grieving process for what things would be lost in the transition.

To equip leaders to effectively implement these strategies, Juice led a training program that began with an exploration of what creates engagement and how to foster it in employees. Participants then explored effective communication strategies. Leaders and managers were trained with the conversation skills of





pulling out how the employee sees the situation, the impact of the situation, their feelings, their needs and the specific request they are making. Then the leader or manager could help the employee see all of these things from their viewpoint. The goal would be to find common ground and, ultimately, to identify a Bigger Reality hidden within the underlying assumptions of interpersonal tension: a solution that works for both parties. Leaders from both entities participated in intensive practice sessions together to hone their new skills.

The Results: Real Collaboration, Real Respect

The full merger is not scheduled to take place until 2011, but already the two organizations are experiencing a much more collaborative approach. Joint teams are more solidified. The kinds of conversations leaders are having with direct reports have shifted dramatically. There is now more understanding and empathy between organizations; where there was once stated respect, there is now true respect.

There are two clear illustrations of the evolving relationship between the two hospitals and their leadership teams. The Human Resources and Education staffs spontaneously came together with a proposal to start a common orientation process sooner rather than later. This proposal was not directed by anyone at the senior level, was approved and is already being implemented. Staff from each hospital take turns leading the sessions, and for practical reasons as well as symbolism, space is used in both facilities during the multi-day orientation.

At the senior level, the two teams realized that their need to meet and make decisions together was causing a “meeting overload” condition for everyone. “Within a short period of time, we collapsed the separate meetings of the two teams, and the joint meeting, into a planned weekly session for both teams with appropriate rotation of standing items so that both joint and individual decisions could be managed effectively,” Cunningham says, “This has led to an openness about issues that might not have occurred under our previous system. The increased level of dialogue and sharing of solutions has been dramatic.”

Communication at all levels is key, and the merger provides an opportunity to communicate in a new way about accountability and recognition. Leaders plan to create and strongly adhere to a





joint Code of Conduct that deals consistently and strongly with poor performance. They are also in the midst of devising better means of consistently applauding good performance.

“When the staff see that we are serious about organizational values—that they’re not just on a piece of paper but being lived out—it creates a kind of magic,” Hurst says.

About North East Mental Health Centre

The Northeast Mental Health Centre (NEMHC) is the largest mental health service provider in northeastern Ontario. The North Bay campus consists of 162 adult inpatient beds while the Sudbury campus has 12 children’s mental health beds. NEMHC is a specialized mental health centre that provides services to people throughout the region suffering from severe and persistent mental illness. Based on a recovery philosophy of care, NEMHC works with other service providers, patients and their families in the design and implementation of care. Programs include specialized adult mental health, senior’s mental health, forensic psychiatry, outreach programs and a regional children’s psychiatric service.

About North Bay General Hospital

North Bay General Hospital has served the families of the North Bay region of Ontario and the surrounding district for over 100 years. The 228-bed NBGH is a result of the merger in 1995 of North Bay’s Civic Hospital and the St. Joseph’s Hospital and the addition of 40 acute mental health beds from the Northeast Mental Health Centre in 2009. The hospital is committed to providing compassionate, quality, patient-focused care to the people of North Bay and surrounding areas. A district referral centre, NBGH is truly a community hospital with more than 95% of family physicians in North Bay actively participating in patient care.

Love at Work

Following the success of his two earlier books, Juice co-founder Brady Wilson has written *Love at Work: Why Passion Drives Performance in the Feelings Economy*. The book seeks to energize organizations for positive change through the notion that engaging people’s hearts trumps engaging their minds when it comes to sparking discretionary effort. The book also seeks to inspire leaders to build cultures where managers can learn to





extend themselves, investing in the highest good of their people, their communities and their planet. The concepts outlined in the book are the same concepts applied to Juice's work with NEMHC and NBGH.

About Juice

Juice Inc. delivers training and development services to increase employee engagement and productivity. Juice works with companies that want to build a productive culture and understand that interactions between people are major drivers of organizational success. Juice's conversation-enhancing methodology delivers a process for improving the human experience in the workplace, while driving employee performance and business results. If you would like more information about how Juice can help your organization, e-mail us at info@juiceinc.com.

JUICE INC.

Orchard Park
5420 Hwy 6 N.,
Suite 201-C
Guelph, ON Canada
N1H 6J2

Office Phone: 519-822-5479

Toll Free Phone: 1-888-822-5479

Email: info@juiceinc.com

Web Site: <http://www.juiceinc.com>

