

THE RENEGADE LEADER

COACHING & CONSULTING GROUP

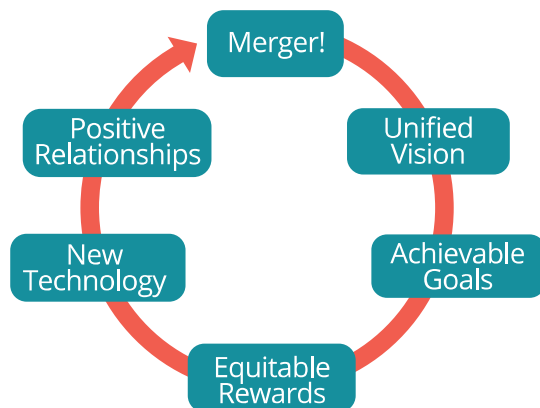
Manchester Community Health Center

The Renegade Leader Guides Newly Merged Health Center to Improved Vision, Relationships, and Innovation

With mergers on the increase in the healthcare industry, the leadership team is often faced with a dilemma: Even when everyone knows where the new organization needs to go, they struggle with how to get there. Based on their different cultures, processes, and communication styles, each of the merged organizations is liable to head off in its own direction without considering overall goals and benefits.

Manchester Community Health Center (MCHC) and the smaller clinics that merged with it both recognized the value of the merger. But each new merger exposed differences and issues around building:

- A unified vision
- Achievable goals
- Equitable rewards and recognition
- Adaptation to new processes and technologies
- Positive internal and external relationships



With the help of Debora McLaughlin of The Renegade Leader Coaching and Consulting Group, MCHC's executive team was able to resolve all five areas of concern while building change leadership, agility, and key insights throughout the newly merged organization. In fact, at the conclusion of the engagement, team leaders reported an 87% increase in positivity and productivity, including an 80% improvement in information processing—and the changes are still ongoing.

Kris McCracken, CEO of MCHC, states, "Debora's greatest contribution was the alignment of team members and the management team in terms of a common direction and a common language to share around the things we needed to do. If your leadership team is in alignment, it trickles down."

Chief Operating Officer, Diane Trowbridge adds, "Debora's biggest contribution to the executive team was her incredible effort to bring us to a place where we could strategically look at what we hoped to change. She gave us the tools to meet those goals and objectives."

DEVELOPING A UNIFIED VISION

One of the fundamental tenets of McLaughlin's practice is that each organization is unique in its needs. She draws upon her wide resources to find the programs and systems that fit best.

Before beginning work with MCHC's executive team, McLaughlin surveyed its 200 employees and also surveyed and interviewed 22 department directors and 4 senior executives. Among other results, the survey identified concerns with communication, training, and the direction and priorities of the new organization. However, 90% of employees felt motivated by the mission of MCHC and 86% believed their coworkers were as committed to quality as they were. The staff also felt extremely positive toward the CEO, and the leadership teams expressed a strong commitment to change.

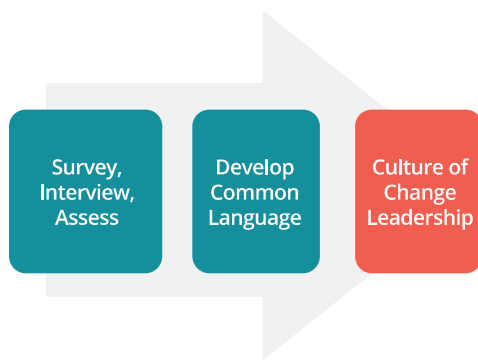
/// SHE GAVE US THE TOOLS TO MEET [OUR] GOALS AND OBJECTIVES. ///

- COO DIANE TROWBRIDGE

A certified change catalyst and ICF Executive Coach, McLaughlin engages healthcare and physician leaders to lead the changes needed to achieve healthcare's quadruple aim outcomes and to foster innovation. "Success lies in communicating a clear strategy that engages and motivates across all team members so everyone understands the big picture and rational for

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what is being asked of them. Open communication allows a safe place to raise concerns and to elevate ideas no matter the reporting structure. MCHC was dedicated to making that happen.”



To build a culture of change leadership, McLaughlin introduced the Change Intelligence system. Starting with a 15-minute assessment, each leader discovered their individual approach to leadership: Head, Heart, and Hands. Individuals with a high Head score are the visionaries; those with high Heart are coaches and mentors; and those with high Hands are the executors.

“The different leadership styles are all valuable but they communicate differently,” McLaughlin explains. “When those differences are recognized and team members learn how to adapt to other styles, communication improves dramatically. Teams also learn how to make up for the attributes they are missing. It’s wonderful to have the desire for change and the capacity to engage others—that’s heart—but you need a clear direction to get there—that’s the head—and you definitely need the hands, people who are willing, able, and have the resources to actually effect change.”

“ DEBORA’S GREATEST CONTRIBUTION WAS THE ALIGNMENT OF TEAM MEMBERS AND THE MANAGEMENT TEAM. ”

- CEO KRIS MCCrackEN

MCHC embraced the CQ system to such an extent that, McCracken says, “It is not unusual for someone to say, ‘This is what I’m doing but I definitely need someone with high heart.’ People recognize their leadership style and their need to balance it.”

In the case of MCHC, heart topped the list at every level—everyone in the organization demonstrated compassion and trust in dealing with patients. They now needed to direct the same consideration to each other. In addition, the further down into the organization that McLaughlin drilled, the fewer head and hands people

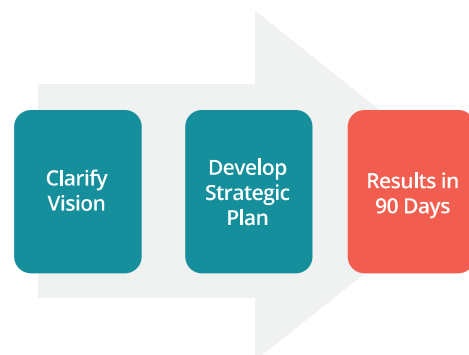
she encountered. This indicated that the merged organizations shared a great drive toward success but needed a clear vision and clear pathway to get there.

Trowbridge states, “I started at MCHC in 2014 and I’ve been here for two mergers. We were all struggling to assimilate in a different culture. Debora facilitated a unified stance with a senior management team that was diverse in personality and styles of management.”

Gavin Muir, Chief Medical Officer, summarizes the insights gained. “As an organization we needed an aligned focus, internally to attract and retain quality employees and externally to continue to meet the needs of the community.”

Committing to Achievable Goals

Using her Distinct by Design Culture framework, McLaughlin facilitated the executive team in identifying their purpose, core values or philosophies and the three top priorities that would help them support and execute their overall strategic plan. To help MCHC’s leadership define their vision in terms of achievable goals, McLaughlin relied in part on Kotter’s 8 Step Change Process: creating a sense of urgency, establishing a group to lead change, defining the end goal, sharing the end goal, encouraging participation, setting short-term goals, persisting in driving change, and connecting the change to the company culture.



The three priorities identified with the Distinct by Design framework became the responsibility of three Action Focus Groups, comprising the executive team, physicians, human resources, IT, and clinical directors, with leaders free to join the group they felt most connected to:

- Cool Runnings! was charged with conducting a benefits review, training and developing staff and leadership, and establishing an infrastructure for rewards and recognition so employees would feel valued and invested.
- Positive Change assessed options for improving

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workflow, to maximize productivity, efficiency, and accuracy across the organization.

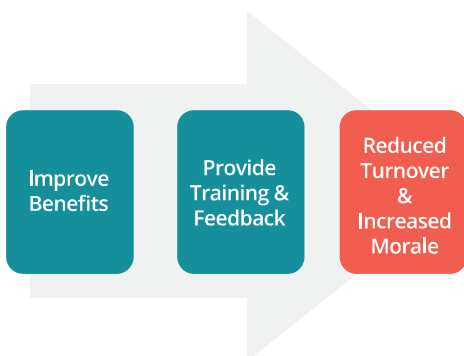
- Mission 8 Possible focused on maximizing internal and external customer service and improving patient health outcomes by building trusting relationships and connections with healthcare providers and teams.

McLaughlin notes, “Knowing that the speed of change is critical, each group was given 90 days to achieve their goals.”

To reduce silos and align the organization, McLaughlin provided executive coaching and monthly leadership skills training for the directors and management staff. She also met with action team leaders to support them in achieving their goals and in managing the dynamics of overseeing a team. “This builds capacity within the organization to continue this process beyond the original engagement.”

Making Rewards & Recognition Equitable

“Making everyone in an organization feel valued is tricky,” McLaughlin admits. “However, it’s also essential. The loss of a physician costs between \$250,000 and \$1 million, and voluntary RN terminations account for 89.2% of hospital separations. In both cases, compensation and culture concerns are often key. Right after a merger, it is especially important to align compensation and to build a unified culture. Rapid turnover makes that difficult. In addition, untrained leaders are often promoted in response to the organization’s growth and may become frustrated by their inability to deliver to goal. Thus, a cycle begins of disengagement, low morale, and turnover.”



MCHC had an excellent record of communication but after the merger they ran into all these problems. “What was being discussed at the senior level simply wasn’t filtering down,” says McLaughlin. “And the survey showed that employees felt overwhelmed.” The merged staff faced changes and disparities in benefits, employee review cycles, and recognition programs, and

leaders were approaching the problem from their own individual perspective and not from a common vision.

While these problems are a normal effect of any merger, MCHC was determined to overcome them strategically.

“ IT WAS ALL ABOUT TAKING THE FIRST STEP. DEBORA WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN THAT. ”

- DIRECTOR OF HR MYRON KURTIK

It’s easy to offer an array of benefits, but how do you know which ones your employees will value? MCHC took the time to ask. They learned that employees valued merit increases, bonus time, earned time, and training, and devalued other programs MCHC had thought were of interest.

Myron Kurtiak, Director of Human Resources and chair of the Cool Runnings! Action Focus Group, says, “Our group got the supervisors and managers talking about valuing our employees and delivering concrete outcomes. We asked: How can we onboard and train early on and get feedback early on; how can we improve our rewards and recognition programs?”

Kurtiak says, “Not all managers and leaders recognized the importance of this—it has financial and cultural aspects. We needed to know how to put a positive foot forward fast. Debora helped us to understand our training needs and how to justify the compensation investments we had to make to value and retain staff.” Myron was able to get the support he needed from finance to make the proposed changes.

He adds that the leaders at MCHC “are well intentioned folks who know this stuff, but it was all about taking the first step. Debora was instrumental in that.”

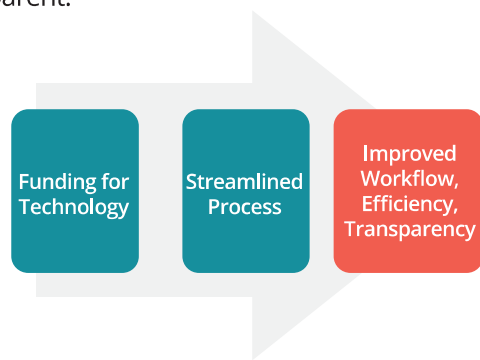
Adapting New Processes & Technologies

One of the complications in any merger is that the different organizations have developed their own processes and technologies in every department, including Human Resources, Finance, Marketing, and Information Management. MCHC had processes and technologies that worked fine when the organization consisted of 50 people; they began to collapse when faced with 200 people. Whether dealing with computer freezes or gaps in technological knowledge or increasing reams of paperwork, those 200 people were frustrated and confused.

The Positive Change Action Focus Group took on the

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mission of cutting costs and reducing errors by improving document workflow and health information exchange between MCHC sites, offices, patients, and partners, making it more streamlined, efficient, and transparent.



“By concentrating on electronic record management,” says McLaughlin, “MCHC knew they could improve workflows for their staff and quality of care for their patients. But here, again, the different merged organizations had different views of whether, when, and how to move data from point A to point B.”

The Positive Change group recommended a new Total-Electronic Document Distribution (TEDD) system to replace the time-consuming and chaotic manual delivery, sorting, and storage of documents. Instead, TEDD created a secure online system for electronically managing and sharing information. The online repository made information on patients, partners, healthcare, and business decisions easy to locate and retrieve regardless of the MCHC site where it originated.

“ DEBORA [HELPED US SHOW] HOW LOGICAL THIS SOLUTION WAS AND WE GOT FUNDING. ”

- DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS, ALMA KURTOVIC

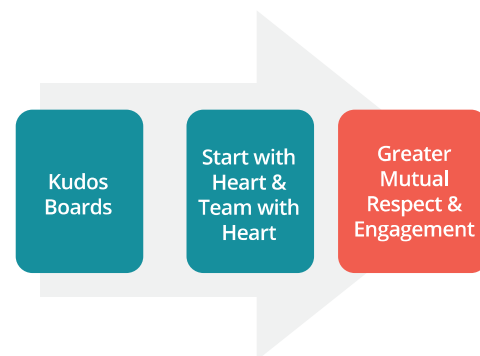
Alma Kurtovic, Director of Operations, was very aware of the inadequacies of the manual system, but had been unable to get everyone onboard with a solution until McLaughlin arrived. “In our Action Focus Group, we were very diverse, including the Chief Medical Officer, several providers, and coordinators. It was interesting how all those levels of management worked together, middle management working with senior management and everyone buying in to the solution. Before Debora arrived, I had spoken to our IT manager but that was about it—there was no funding. After Debora, we showed how logical this solution was and we got the funding. It was really useful to have someone outside our team, keeping us unified.”

As a result, her team reduced processing time for documents from 10 days to 2, consolidated documents into one management system, reduced errors and improved accountability.

Fostering Positive Internal & External Relationships

The third Action Focus Group, Mission 8 Possible, was led by Trowbridge and by Education and Compliance Coordinator Susan M. Moreau. Moreau states, “We were trying to promote internal as well as external customer service. Debora shared tools on how to stay organized and how to make our strategies more engaging. She provided structure and guidance and made it a point to be available if we needed support. Debora helped people feel comfortable about speaking up and having their opinions valued. She gave us a better understanding of how people interact.”

Following a merger, McLaughlin explains, “so much information has to be shared so quickly that everyone becomes overwhelmed and begins to rely on one-way electronic communication instead of in person conversation. With a focus on patient satisfaction, it is easy to lose sight of everyday internal communication. With the rate of burnout and turnover in healthcare, that’s a costly risk to take.”



The Mission 8 Positive group brain-stormed ways of making people feel valued. By strengthening connections throughout the organization, they aimed to improve:

- Employee and patient retention
- Patient health outcomes through trusting relations between the patient and healthcare team
- Employee morale, engagement, and awareness of their positive contribution.

The group developed three main initiatives to achieve those improvements. They set up several physical “kudos” boards for posting positive comments about

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employees, updated weekly and created two H.E.A.R.T initiatives (hear, emphasize, apologize, respond, thank). The first is a universal greeting S.T.A.R.T with H.E.A.R.T (smile, tell your name, role and what to expect, actively listen, rapport and relationship building, and thank them). The second is T.E.A.M with H.E.A.R.T (treat coworkers with respect and courtesy, empathy, active listening/assist/assume good intent, and mutual commitment). The key ingredients in these initiatives were that they promoted offline, personal interaction and celebrated the experience of good relationships.

“ DEBORA... WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN WHAT WAS ACCOMPLISHED. WE STILL MEET AND THE WORK IS STILL CONTINUING, EVEN IF SHE ISN'T HERE. ”

- COO DIANE TROWBRIDGE

As one employee put it, “We are no longer walking on eggshells here. The gossip has stopped. We all work well together as a team and get the job done and feel good.”

Trowbridge states, “Debora had a great influence on my colleagues and the whole management team. She was instrumental in what was accomplished. We still meet and the work is still continuing, even if she isn't here.”

Conclusion

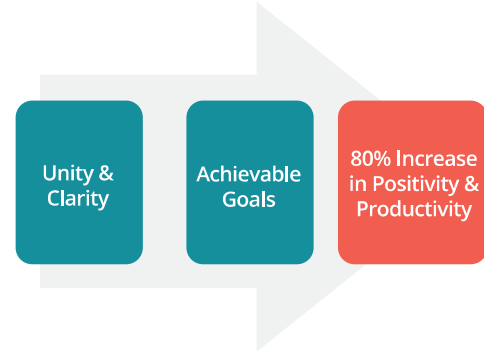
Manchester Community Health Center grew by leaps and bounds, and it was difficult for employees, leaders, patients, and partners to absorb all the changes that accompany a merger. By bringing in Debora McLaughlin, the executive team was able to focus its attention on achievable goals most in line with its mission.

As always, McLaughlin customizes her approach to the needs of her client, drawing upon her toolbox to combine surveys and assessments, executive coaching, training, and facilitation to reach their individual aims, including:

- Clarifying the merged organization's goals and mission
- Understanding the hierarchy
- Creating smooth working relationships
- Developing new career paths and benefits
- Achieving business objectives.

At MCHC, the survey, CQ system, Distinct by Design Culture framework, and Kotter 8 Step Change process gave the leadership team a better understanding of the issues they faced, a language in which to discuss their differences, and a common commitment to three specific areas of change.

McLaughlin's customized approach led to the formation of three Action Focus Groups concentrating on making rewards and recognition consistent throughout the organization; adapting new technologies; and improving internal and external relations. As a result of this strategy, communication increased, turnover decreased, workflow became more efficient and reliable, and a restored sense of mutual respect permeated the organization.



As CEO of the MCHC, McCracken is especially appreciative of Debora's efforts. “She gave people a framework to think about their differences, a context and tools to move them along, an outside perspective, and a common language. Debora's creation and facilitation of Action Focus Groups with our department leaders enabled us to achieve strategic priorities faster and with greater collaboration—and have fun doing it.”

BY SHARON BAILLY, TWP Marketing & Technical Communications

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