

Operating Solutions-Oriented Meetings

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Healthcare organizations implement human connectivity experiences on an ongoing basis. In fact, you can enter a facility at the start of the day and determine if it's going to be a human connectivity or human entanglement day. Human connectivity supports teaming, solution-oriented involvement, common purpose and the ability to get things done. Human entanglement represents constant conflict, turf, finger pointing, people protecting themselves and an inability to move the organization ahead for purposeful outcomes.

How an organization runs its meetings helps determine whether human connectivity or human entanglement will occur since meetings are a central place to showcase human connectivity experiences. This is well and good if meetings are focused and solution-oriented rather than "meetings for meeting's sake". If meetings are designed to be a gripe or problem session, then positive outcomes will not be accomplished. If they are designed so turf & territory remain the "rule of thumb", then we will never reach the levels of success needed in today's meeting.

Why is it important for meetings to be functional and solution-oriented? Very simply, we are being paid today in an outcome-based process by private pay individuals, Medicare, Medicaid, and managed care; and they expect "quality for a set price". Individuals and organizations are not going to sort out for us all of our turf and territory problems. They'll say to us, here is the client, patient, resident, and you're to receive a certain amount of money for that individual. It is your job to design a successful human connectivity experience for yourself and that client for a fee.

This capitulation of time, money and energy is an important piece of business. Otherwise, we'll be spending time on useless endeavors that will not be paid for by anybody. In addition, inefficient meetings can degenerate morale and set up a tone of frustration within the organization that can lead to staff turnover. Another factor that inhibits effective meetings is that many organizations don't have enough time in the day to get everything done for the demands placed upon them. So it doesn't help when there are dysfunctional entanglements occurring throughout the day (i.e., bad meetings).

Having made that statement, it is important to move onto how to function in solution-oriented meetings. Naturally, there are ground rules that should be set in the organization for meetings, including:

1. They must start and end on time.
2. An agenda for each meeting must be available to all attendees prior to the meeting whether in writing or verbally. No one should come to a meeting and not know why and how to be prepared.
3. There should be a definitive statement that "WWW" ("Who" is going to do "What" by "When"?) will be accomplished at each meeting. If we develop a policy that we never leave a meeting without setting up solution-oriented involvement on each of the topics, then we will have set up a design for the meeting that will run effectively forever.
4. The "WWW" sets the final call in motion for each topic so we have moved the process forward toward a solution or outcome rather than stalemate, finger-pointing or waiting for somebody to break us through the paralysis. A very important point to note is that the "who" should not always be a

high-level manager, administrator or executive. We should keep the solutions to problems being enacted closest to where the problem is evident. In other words, flushing problems up to the highest-level person in the room will assure we have an ineffective result. This could include more meetings, committees, policies, new forms, mandatory in-services or higher level involvement from outside the organization.

If we believe strongly in solution-oriented meetings we should decide that these ground rules are established for all meetings. In addition, we believe these additional ground rules should be included:

1. Civility (only one person speaks at a time).
2. Don't attack people, attack the problem.
3. Don't bring up a problem without suggesting a solution.
4. Remain open to listen to all points of view.
5. Come prepared for the meeting.
6. Stay on agenda.
7. Put the agenda in a focused, prioritized order so the most important items are addressed at the top of the meeting. If we run out of time, the least important items are at the end of the meeting to be carried over to the next meeting.
8. Make sure the focus is not on individual turf or territory. Avoid using words like "I", "we" or "they". Try to use words like "we" or "our".
9. Try to set common goals and objectives for focused outcomes to be accomplished at the meeting rather than setting up purposeful individual gain for "territorial warlords".

One of the best techniques to run a meeting with an agenda is to publish it in advance and obtain agreement as to who is to do what by when. Then the focus of the agenda draws everyone into conversations about agenda topics, rather than experiencing the old "circle of doom" meetings. These are meetings with high-level officials that go around the table with everyone getting their turn to bring up issues, concerns, problems or opportunities. This rarely leads to focused human connectivity experiences.

Instead, it allows people to promote their self-serving territorial interests or simply say, "I've got nothing to report" because they don't want to stir up anything in the meeting. These meetings become boring, are ill-conceived and are usually designed only to give information to the high level people who should not be involved in individual situations anyway.

We're opposed to going around the circle unless it's a general update at the end of the meeting about what's going on from everyone's viewpoint. Instead, if the topic of the meeting relates to revenue, staffing, regulation, documentation issues, or concerns over specific customers, we should focus the topic to that particular endeavor. Everyone should be required to attend meetings with ideas, answers and suggestions about what could be done about the topic.

This is entirely different than bringing information to meetings with people saying, "That's not my problem", "I don't do that", "I'm not a specialist in that", "I don't want to 'stick my nose' in that area", "that will upset somebody else". By deciding the meeting is to be

transdisciplinary, we have set up a method for solution-oriented outcomes and everyone will have the right to "stick their nose" in everyone else's "turf".

For example, if we're attending a care planning meeting, and people only bring up goals and suggestions about the resident, client or patient from their turf or territory concerns, it will not be an effective care plan for the individual. When there is interaction in discussing what we need to do to help that individual based upon the current assessed problems, then we have a functional human connectivity experience. That experience will be good, not only for the resident, but also the individuals involved in that meeting.

Meetings must have conflict management protocols and methods to deal with harmony concerns. It doesn't mean that every meeting is to be totally collaborative with no conflict and disagreement. In fact, to move forward, organizations need some form of appropriate tension or disagreement to move the organization ahead to effective new solutions. In making an organization operate solution-oriented meetings, it is important for the top of the organization to start this process and keep the ball rolling in that direction.

How the top develops its role modeling of successful solution-oriented meetings will influence how the rest of the organization sets the tone. If the top of your organization shows up late, runs over on meeting times, has no agenda, is not focused and ends up with no solution-oriented outcomes, then you can anticipate the same process will take place throughout the remainder of the organization.

It is also important for higher-level individuals of the organization not to set a tone that they're holding court at the top where everything must be brought to their attention so they can be the final decision maker. One skill we believe has to be invited into the organization is the "huddle". All good teams that take on opportunities or challenges during sporting events use the "huddle" or "time out".

In fact, when physicians are unsure about what to do with our care, they call a "huddle" with other professionals with assessments or tests to determine the best course of action.

We find, however, that many of the day-to-day issues facing specific units, departments and shifts in healthcare organizations attempt to be fixed or implemented with individuals doing it alone. When there is a concern on the unit about disharmony, finger-pointing, resident care, staffing issues, concerns for methodology or protocol, anyone on the team should call the huddle and say, "hey, time out, everyone come together, we need to talk about this issue". If not now, 20 minutes from now or whenever the time frame avails itself.

Letting things fester or be delayed until there's another higher-level meeting will cause the team to feel fragmented. This leads to human entanglement rather than positive human connectivity experiences. Having individuals empowered on a daily basis during the "game" allows them to be involved in appropriate, "who's going to do what by when" solution-oriented conversations on real issues that come up every day. It is possible to run successful meetings. You must plan, be organized and practice what you say you believe.