

How one company fosters a culture of collaboration

At Clinic Service, Andrew Graham checks in with every employee each week

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(Editor's note: This is the third part of a series intended to give business leaders, founders, and executives, greater insight into building a great workplace.)

Clinic Service was founded in 1974 with the mission: to maximize the profit for physicians and medical practices. Nine years ago, Andrew Graham purchased Clinic Service and began shifting the culture from the normal command/control model to a new one of collaboration.

Andrew's perspective and beliefs about leadership were influenced by 15 years of management consulting and four years as production manager at The Second City (his first job after college). He had learned what really does work, as evidenced by the success Clinic Service has enjoyed under his leadership.

As a medical billing provider with clients both locally and nationally, Clinic Services has a track record of 99.7 percent collectible revenues, and despite the uncertainty and disruption in the health care field, grew 30 percent in 2016.

Andrew's response to the request to interview him demonstrated his view of leadership: *If I am getting my job done, I should have all the time in the world.*

So what does Andrew think his job is in leading his company? *A leader's job is to educate and have others succeed; in other words, make everyone's life a little better – basically, to set the stage for success and get out of the way.*

For Andrew, this means dealing with the antecedents to behavior, or AKUS: Awareness, Knowledge, Understanding and Skill (AKUS) require different tools and types of education. *While awareness can be accomplished with a webinar, on the other end of the spectrum, skill and behavior change requires a targeted application with more human interaction.*

One of his fundamental beliefs is: *People come to work to do their best and a relaxed, happy, comfortable environment allows people to do their best work in a sustainable fashion.*

The Clown's Prayer inspires him: *I am living well, if I can create an environment where I "... create more laughter than tears, dispense more happiness than gloom, spread more cheer than despair..."*

His leadership beliefs naturally show up in his actions, as well as where he places his attention and time. His Monday morning ritual is to visit

with each staff member as a way of checking in on how they are and listen for what, if anything, they need.

His belief that his job is to educate, leads him to challenge himself to learn more. He continually reads new books, learns from others and when he first took the reins of this company at the same time started his MBA, using it to shape his thinking in leading the company.

Believing that growth begins with people, very quickly after buying the company he selected a group of current employees that he named Emerging Leaders. They, together as a group, created the *Rules of the Road* that serve as guiding principles for actions, decisions and how to treat each other. It doesn't take long to hear Andrew say one of the following: *We build It Ourselves - We are in charge of our future. It is up to you (us) - No one is coming.*

Michael Kuehn joined Andrew as VP of Sales and Marketing in 2008. Their history of working together had already demonstrated their compatibility. As Michael says:

A critical role Andrew and I serve is to create the room to fail, learn and grow. A large part of my job is to set the tone and to walk the talk – to demonstrate by example. We are a values-based organization where our Rules of the Road guide us.

What we demonstrate, and how we operate as a team is – "This is where we are, now let's move forward." We don't point fingers and blame. We talk about why you made that decision (that didn't turn out as well as you thought), learn from the mistakes, and figure out where to go from here.

We have mothers and daughters who work together here. Our average tenure is 8 years; while that comes with some small challenges for innovation, it is also a lot of stability and strength. We want to make it as easy as possible for everyone to be successful. If there is an issue with a client, one of the leaders steps in and gets it out of the way.

We have done very well and Andrew's leadership has created a culture where we understand that real life gets in the way. If a family member is in the hospital, go deal with that. If you need to go, then go. Our team culture allows for that, and we trust people.

For Michael, a fundamental principle is *keep the ship steady. Don't get too high with the highs, nor too low with the lows. Let's not jump when we think there is a crisis. We could have reacted to the disruption and uncertainty in the healthcare industry. Instead we stayed with our vision, trusted our strategy, and grew 30 percent last year. The people we have are good. They know what they are doing.*

As their company results demonstrate, yes, they do know what they are doing.



Rachel Davis, PhD., founder of The Leadership Elevator, is no stranger to complex and seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Her unique approach was developed in working with over 100,000 individuals, in 12 countries and in a wide variety of cultures and settings. Her current focus is elevating leadership, communication, and engagement for the purpose of greater results and quality of life.