

Arkansas Children's Hospital Case Study

Arkansas Children's Hospital
Becomes An Employer of Choice
A Journey to Excellence with The Disney Institute





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*“Some look at things that are, and ask ‘why’?
I dream of things that never were and ask ‘why’ not?
(George Bernard Shaw)*

Arkansas Children’s Hospital (ACH) is a leading pediatric health-care facility located in Little Rock, Arkansas. The 93-year-old organization has grown over the years from a small hospital to a comprehensive medical center with 2,600 employees.

In 2001, Arkansas Children’s Hospital was struggling with the recruitment of critical staff including nurses, respiratory therapists and patient information assistants who manage the intake process. The hospital had used the short-term fixes employed by other hospitals facing the same challenge – offering signing and relocation bonuses to entice new talent. Compounding ACH’s recruitment challenge was high staff turnover rates in several mission-critical departments.

CEO, Dr. Jonathan Bates, and COO, Scott Gordon, decided it was time to invest in the culture change necessary to become an employer of choice. They began investigating other successful healthcare and best practice organizations. Along the way, they were encouraged to consider the Disney Institute at the Walt Disney World Resort. They became intrigued by the unique approach that combines ‘benchmarks of excellence’ principles with behind-the-scenes visits to Disney facilities to witness real-life application.

In May 2002, Arkansas Children’s Hospital took its senior management team to Florida where they attended Disney Institute’s program “Excellence in Healthcare Leadership.” Intact hospital teams combining medical, clinical and administrative leaders learned Disney’s successful theories and principles in combination with visits to various Disney locations to see how management theory becomes standard operating procedure. Participants also got a unique opportunity to become Disney “Cast Members” as they experienced a modified version of Disney’s employee orientation program, called “Traditions.” This shortened version provided an overview of how Disney instills a sense of pride and communicates the performance expectations of its culture to its new cast members, vendors and affiliates.

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The excitement kept building as ACH teams brainstormed ideas for implementing powerful Disney principles once they arrived home.

Dr. Bates was committed to building on the momentum created through the leadership training experience at the Disney Institute. He actively encouraged his senior leadership team to commit to the cultural changes needed to become an employer of choice. He instituted "Friday afternoon sessions" in which the management team would come together and progress through the implementation of the principles learned at and modeled by Disney. Task forces were created to clearly define a culture of excellence and tackle the execution issues.

To ensure the learning filtered throughout the organization, several layers of management were also sent through the Disney Institute program. This allowed more leaders to gain understanding and buy-in, and establish an emotional connection to the culture change they were trying to implement at ACH.

Two key concepts from the Disney Institute contributed greatly to the successful change initiatives at ACH. Disney's Service Theme and Service Standards allow for simple, powerful, consistent and global communication of the organization's commitment. With the help of Disney Institute, Arkansas Children's Hospital developed a service theme to capture its purpose. ACH understood the need for employees to make a clear connection each day with



their individual reasons for working in healthcare. "It's so easy to get bogged down with the high volume of daily tasks, and lose sight of the larger purpose for being here," says Scott Gordon. After much deliberation, team members came back to the words that had been painted on their hospital exterior many years before, "Giving Care, Love and Hope."

From there, they identified four service standards and nine behavioral standards that embodied how their community would bring its service theme alive. From then on, all decisions at all levels in the organization were, and still are, measured against their service theme and standards. Using Disney as the model, ACH also developed its service recovery strategy to address times when things would go wrong.

Tremendous emphasis was placed on communicating the service theme, service standards, behavioral standards and service recovery strategy. Based on its experience with Disney's "Traditions" program, ACH developed a similar process. Every one of 2,600 employees went through this program in less than six months. Even vendors with whom the hospital worked closely had their management staff attend. It was critical, as Disney Institute explained, that the culture be consistent in its commitment to excellence. As part of their new employee orientation process, ACH's "Traditions" program ensures that everyone begins with a clear understanding of the organization's purpose and standards.

Modeled after Disney's Casting Center, the recruiting process for some of the large, high-turnover departments was centralized. 'Daily Huddles' between managers and employees were introduced and their service theme/standards were and are now communicated visually and verbally in regular communications with employees. The Disney principles were even applied to the hospital's new entrance wing design, and ACH is reworking its way-finding/signage program based on what they learned from Disney.

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ACH has continued to work with the Disney Institute team, which provides periodic check-ins and assists with

implementation challenges. Recently, Disney Institute went to ACH to provide additional training to middle managers. Specifically, Disney provided content designed to reinforce the HR practices of selecting the right talent, training for success, and providing a culture of care.

Imagine being part of an organization in which you have a clear understanding of its values, standards of service and performance. When everyone is committed to exceptional service, they make a difference every day and their ideas are heard and considered.

"We are pleased beyond belief with what we learned from the Disney Institute," Scott Gordon said. "Their benchmarking experience builds on the best of people's natural inclination to work with purpose and make a contribution. They offer a specific methodology for building a culture that nurtures and supports exceptional service."

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The Business Results

Employee opinion scores have steadily increased since 2001. ACH is now ranked in the 99th percentile of Employer of Choice as compared with other hospitals across the country. Nursing turnover rates dropped from 14% in fiscal 2001 to 12% in 2004, while growing staff size. For respiratory therapists, the turnover rate fell from 10% to 8%, and as a result of the 'central casting' concept adopted from the Disney Institute, patient information assistants' turnover fell dramatically from 127% to 15% during this same three-year period. Patient satisfaction mean scores increased an average of 3.875 from 2001 to 2004, with all departments now rating in the 80's or 90's out of 100. Arkansas Children's Hospital has seen its operating margin rise from 3.5% in 2001 to 8.4% in 2004. The hospital has clearly become an excellent place to work in the healthcare arena, attracting and retaining the best talent available and creating satisfying patient experiences.

"We are now purposeful in treating our children, families, fellow team members and entire community with care, love and hope," says Scott Gordon, COO of Arkansas Children's Hospital.

"Now that we have a Culture by Design, we find that all of our efforts - fundraising, retention of team members, patient satisfaction and work with our physician partners - are more

successful because we are more consistent and focused. While never complete, we are pleased with our journey's progress to date. We could not, in our wildest imagination, have predicted how powerful a change agent the Disney Institute training would be for our organization."

What were once just words painted on the front of the hospital are now living in the daily actions of everyone who works at Arkansas Children's Hospital. What breathed life into those words and made them the very essence of ACH's culture is a story of their Journey to Excellence. Their partner on this journey was the Disney Institute.

To learn more about how Disney Institute can assist your organization on its own journey to excellence, call 407-566- 1738 or visit www.disneyinstitute.com




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