

## Hospital sets positive business example

**Colin Read: Everybody's business**

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— Some ask how they performed because they already know the answer.

Some others ask so you can reinforce their confidence.

Some are afraid to measure their performance because they may not like the answer.

Some just ask each other.

And Champlain Valley Physicians Hospital asks its community how they are doing because they have something to prove. They care about what patients think, and they want to do better all the time.

And that makes all the difference. This is what I learned from this year's CVPH annual meeting.

I know of no organization in town that could not learn something about management, leadership and community engagement from CVPH. I am simply amazed at the job CVPH does for this community.

How do we know that they are doing a good job? Because they are not afraid to ask. For instance, they thought they were doing a pretty good job in one dimension of patient care. They already knew how they thought they were doing. Instead, they wanted to know what their patients thought. And the patients told them the performance was merely satisfactory.

Some may ridicule customer opinions as ramblings of those who don't really understand the intricacies of their business. Others would become defensive. Still others do not have the courage or concern to ask in the first place. And while some would just settle for satisfactory, CVPH wanted to continuously improve. From the feedback they received, they moved their performance from merely satisfactory to excellent. They never would have improved if they did not have the good sense to ask, and to use that information to motivate change.

In measure after measure, instance after instance, survey after survey, this hospital soon began to rank in the 80th, in the 90th, even in the 99th percentile in the quality of hospital care nationwide.

They excel even with a motto that they will never turn away someone they can help, regardless of ability to pay. They do this even though their funding sources are always under pressure. They do so in an industry that depends on doctors who are already in debt by hundreds of thousands of dollars on their first day of work. And they do so because they realize that the highest quality patient care they can offer is the noble and responsible thing to do.

They do not have to continually strive for excellence. In fact, as the region's largest employer and the fourth largest remotely located hospital in the country, they are a near monopoly. Nonetheless, they strive for

excellence because they are professionals in the business of public faith and trust.

Their professionalism in an industry that depends on faith and trust can teach us all something.

There are few faith-and-trust industries.

We can hear for ourselves when our mechanic fixes the rattle in our car. We can tell if our haircut is attractive, if our restaurant meal is tasty, or if our dripping pipe has been fixed.

But we can't easily tell if our children have received a good education or if our doctors and nurses have done everything possible to heal us.

We entrust these responsibilities to highly respected professionals because we can only hope and trust they will do a professional job. And so we must trust they take pride in their work, are willing to invest in their skills, insist on the competency of their colleagues, go that extra mile and care that their clients receive the promised services to the very best of their abilities.

Perhaps in these troubling times we should all be in the faith-and-trust business. While few of us consider our contribution so important that a bad day can mean the loss of another's life, wouldn't it be refreshing if all of us worked each day as if our jobs were that important?

What if we all looked at all we do based on how we affect our clients, our friends and our loved ones, based on how others depend on us, and based on how we can do better?

I have said before in this column that our current economic malaise is a crisis of confidence, of faith and of trust. The greed of a few has destroyed our collective faith in financial markets. If only those that brought our economy to its knees had the same sense of honesty and responsibility that we take as a matter of faith from our hospital staff.

That is not to say a vow of public service and benevolence means a vow of sacrifice and poverty. People should be able to do well by doing good. If that is not the American Way, then what is?

If we lived in a world where the measure of our worth and our reward is in proportion to how we positively and measurably contribute to the greater good, we would not see the greed on Wall Street, the corruption on K Street or the ethical breaches in board rooms. We would not have the shortages of nurses or social services professionals. And we would not be suffering a recession that is the product of individual actors who believe they have no responsibility to the greater economy.

We in the North Country are justifiably proud of our hospital and the many ways they contribute to and engage in our community. They remind us that we are all in this together and have a shared responsibility, something many in the North Country demonstrate daily. There is nothing small about this hospital or this town.

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