Establishing Core Values in the Workplace

Treating patients like you want to be treated.

BY VANCE THOMPSON, MD, FACS, AND MATT JENSEN

Core values are patient-centered principles that guide the actual tasks that we do. The goal is that every action taken will optimize the overall experience of the patient. Just as doctors take a Hippocratic oath to “do no harm,” our clinic’s team took an oath to deliver the best refractive surgery care and ensure the best experience for our patients.

The Vance Thompson Vision refractive surgery team at Sioux Valley Clinic (Sioux Falls, SD) agreed to abide by a list of core values that represents the unwritten or traditional rules within us all. It is our standard of behavior and what we expect from one another as a team. Our group has been doing what we do for a long time. We believe we know how to deliver care with the highest level of quality. As we grow, it is vital for us to impart those standards of excellence to our newer members. When every team member commits to a list of core values that they believe is consistent with how they would want to be treated, it maximizes the chance that it is exactly how they will treat our patients, thus making for a very positive patient experience. We did not want the continued growth of our practice to compromise the standards and atmosphere that have made us successful during the last 15 years.

Building the List

Our list of core values (see Five Core Values at Vance Thompson Vision) was based upon the philosophy of many cutting-edge companies from other consumer driven industries such as The Ritz-Carlton. We felt we had to start with industries that pride themselves on knowing their customers better than anyone. Then, we took our own thoughts and ideas about how we like to be treated and created our own list of basic customer service values.

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Five Core Values at Vance Thompson Vision

- “Our patients are our most important resource. They should be treated like guests and family visiting our home.”
- “Each team member is empowered to look for ways to exceed the patient’s expectations and enhance their experience at all times.”
- “Each patient should experience our undivided attention. Their preferred name should be used, they should be escorted at all times, and all attention should focus on them when they are present.”
- “Each team member should look at each patient they encounter as an opportunity and privilege to affect their life in a positive way. Each patient should leave here feeling better then when they arrived.”
- “Each team member should participate in a Cadence of Coverage that over-communicates responsibilities and workflow so that we can best meet the needs of each other and our patients.”
EMPLOYEES’ ADHERENCE

Each of our team members signs the Declaration of Core Values, which gives us all ownership in the aforementioned philosophy. It permeates every patient interaction in our office. Additionally, we feel it positively affects the way our employees treat each other in the workplace.

RULES DO NOT CHANGE. THEY GROW

We believe it is important for surgeons and office managers to realize that, just as the refractive surgery market changes, core values evolve. We review our list on an annual basis during an off-site retreat with our entire staff. Each person voices his opinion on each core value and helps decide on necessary updates, eliminations, etc. We really want to hear from all employees because it will affect the work they do in their job function.

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The process of upholding and devising proper core values never ends for an organization that continues to grow. We are passionate about delivering the best service we can while continually learning from other companies.

CONCLUSION

It is important to recruit people who are willing to embrace our center’s core values and to be up front about what we are trying to achieve. One of Vance Thompson Vision’s philosophies is to recruit talented individuals who naturally adhere to these core values, because those characteristics—unlike a knowledge of ophthalmology—are difficult to teach. The key is to provide a working environment that nurtures these core values. The benefit of defining our team’s core values is that it gets everyone moving in the same direction, but, more importantly, it puts premium patient care where it belongs—at the point of service.

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