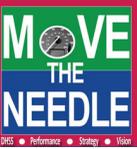


State Lab Steps Up to Show-Me Challenge



Laura Naught, the state laboratory's quality systems officer, holds a pipette, an instrument used to measure liquid

Changes at the State Lab:

- **Engaged** a quality improvement organization to determine organizational strengths and action steps to enhance customer satisfaction and overall performance
- **Developed** a performance improvement plan
- **Identified** strategies to improve workforce engagement, internal processes and the aggregation of customer data
- **Improved** employee workforce satisfaction and engagement by reducing the “silo effect,” where units operate independently of each other

The Missouri State Public Health Laboratory is stepping up efforts to improve performance and communication. They recently produced an E. coli video that won fifth place in a national competition. They also give tours of what they do—to each other.

The laboratory’s desire to enhance performance prompted it to participate in the Show-Me Challenge, a guided self-assessment tool that gauges an organization’s strengths and indicates where improvements are needed. Created by the Excellence in Missouri Foundation, the tool gave the laboratory high marks for a well-trained workforce and a management team that continually focuses on improving laboratory services. Those services include performing about five million annual tests for infectious diseases, genetic disorders and environmental health concerns to keep Missourians safe.

The tool also revealed that the laboratory could improve workforce satisfaction and engagement; reduce the silo effect in which its 14 units operate primarily independent of each other; improve its customer and internal data-collection processes; and, improve and deploy its strategic plan.

Armed with those results, the laboratory developed a performance improvement plan. That plan includes strategies and action steps to increase performance, and methods to measure any increase. To increase employee engagement, for instance, all employees can access executive management meeting minutes rather than learn about meeting outcomes through an e-mail from their unit managers.

“Learning what’s going on in your organization through e-mail is not the most effective way to communicate,” says Laura Naught, the laboratory’s quality systems officer.

For the first time, employees are also participating in a survey to assess their satisfaction and communication needs. And the laboratory’s 14 unit managers give tours to employees to explain what each unit does.

“It’s all in an effort to break down the silo effect,” Naught explains.

Naught also credits the Show-Me Challenge with encouraging employees to create “Outbreak Shutout,” the video that won fifth place in a national competition sponsored by the American Society of Clinical Pathology.

The laboratory was able to contract with the Excellence in Missouri Foundation through funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s National Public Health Improvement Initiative. *(See related story, “The Game’s Afoot,” on the next page).*

The Game's Afoot!



For the first time ever, employees at the Missouri State Public Health Laboratory participated in pet and baby photo contests and scavenger hunts this year. It may sound like too much fun for the work day, but games can increase workforce morale, engagement and proficiency.

The scavenger hunt, for instance, helped employees become experts on the laboratory's strategic plan. Posters about the plan were displayed all over the laboratory; employees then received questions about the plan and had to scavenge it for answers. Those with the highest number of correct answers won coffee-mug prizes.

"Before the scavenger hunt, no one knew about our strategic plan or understood it," says Laura Naught, the lab's quality systems officer.

Lab employees also have the opportunity to have a little fun in meetings these days, in an effort to enhance morale. Lab Director Bill Whitmar acted as a game show host at one such meeting last October and invited Miranda Carter of the Newborn Screening Unit to stack and unstack 35 cups in one minute in a version of NBC's "Minute to Win It." Nicole Farnsworth of the Post Analytical Reporting Team tried to stack three golf balls in 60 seconds or less. And Johnathan Johnson of the Central Services Unit attempted the "The Hanky Panky," to remove all the tissues from two tissue boxes in the same deadline.

"Have you ever tried to pluck 150 tissues from a Kleenex box in under a minute?" Naught laughs. She doubles as the lab's game-maker guru. "It's really hard."

"We're doing all this in an effort to enhance workforce engagement and morale, two areas that needed improvement, according to the self-assessment tool," Naught explains. "It's my job to make sure employees have a little fun along the way."



Photos: Miranda Carter of the Newborn Screening Unit, top left; Nicole Farnsworth of the Post Analytical Reporting Team, top right; Johnathan Johnson of the Central Services Unit, bottom