



## Relationship Building

The IHS Office of Public Health Support (OPHS) presents the third in its series of Retention Briefs designed to help address the challenge of retaining professional and clinical staff within an Indian health facility. We encourage you to review these cases and to discuss with the leadership team (administration, clinical directors, other leaders, etc.) how you can implement these practices when faced with similar challenges.

This issue is focused on the type of relationship the leadership team can intentionally build with staff members. A successful relationship depends on how you personally present yourself to employees, as well as how well information is shared at every level and how enthusiastically employees are given the ability to help manage issues that will eventually help you to achieve long-term employee retention.

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## Best Practices

### LEADERSHIP

**Work the Late Shift** – A successful leader leads by example. If your facility is open 24/7 or has a night shift, include those late hours in your own work schedule once a week. Either extend your day or come in later or work a weekend on a regular basis. Not only will you make yourself available to staff members during these times, you will also show your affiliation and camaraderie as part of the overall caregiving team. You'll soon find that your willingness to do this will be appreciated and reciprocated as others mirror the actions of their leadership.

### COMMUNICATION

**Recognize the Support Staff** – A pat on the back can go a long way in improving someone's morale or sense of accomplishment. Most often, this type of positive feedback is given to the employees working in the trenches. By recognizing that their accomplishments were achieved with the help of clinical and administrative support and, in turn, extending your appreciation for everyone involved, you will send a message of universal gratitude and acknowledgement. And by validating the achievement of all individuals involved, you'll reinforce a positive sense of teamwork and shared ownership of outcomes and set the stage for ongoing successful working relationships.

### SHARED MANAGEMENT

**Give Ownership to Others** – Everyone has a stake in the success of the organization. When you spread responsibility across the staff, you are engaging them in an environment where they are exposed to risk. They then must face outcomes and discover how to correct any problems resulting from actions that have been taken. Be assured that by holding them responsible for outcomes, they will feel respected and know that you trust them to handle issues – an empowerment they will take seriously and apply to future decision making.

### COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Culture affects how people communicate, understand and respond to health information. It's important for Indian health professionals to recognize the cultural beliefs, values, attitudes, traditions, language preferences and health practices of their American Indian/Alaska Native patient population. In doing so, they also should be willing to have a third-party "communicator" step in when necessary. Whether he or she is the facility supervisor, a patient liaison or a Tribal representative, a third-party liaison may put patients at ease, knowing they have an advocate on their side to clearly explain their conditions, methods of treatment or follow-up plans. By offering his or her knowledge of the community, the culture and the medical beliefs of the patient population, a patient liaison can be a beneficial resource for health care providers seeking to work with both patients and the Tribes in the most effective manner.