Creating a Culture of High Performance

Empowering Employees at the Virginia Department of Social Services

When Carl Ayers joined the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) in 2014, he was the ninth person in the role of Director of Family Services in less than 11 years. With instability at the leadership level, employees consistently felt pulled from one priority to the next which impacted their ability to successfully serve their constituents.

He recognized the need to align the team and improve delivery of services. In partnership with Amediate, LLC, a certified Emergenetics provider, the VDSS utilized our programming to:

- Improve employee and team performance
- Inspire employee engagement and increase retention
- Create opportunities for recognition and promotions of team members

The Challenge

The Department of Family Services at VDSS plays a vital role in helping improve the lives and communities of the residents of Virginia. Given the nature of the work and the potential to make a positive impact, it is imperative that the team works effectively to achieve results.

However, the team was struggling to find success. A practice model introduced in 2008 was not fully operationalized six years later. Employees would discuss programs and develop plans, and often outcomes never materialized. Communication was stunted, and employees hesitated to share honest input. With these challenges, the VDSS faced a financial penalty following an unsuccessful Title IV-E review.

To support his new team, Carl began looking for programs to:

- Unify department leaders to establish common goals
- Teach employees how to communicate and collaborate more effectively
- Empower staff to drive initiatives forward

Emergenetics at the VDSS

Amediate engaged the department leaders in our signature workshop – the Meeting of the Minds – before facilitating a leadership retreat. During the retreat, the group reviewed their Emergenetics Profiles, engaged in team building and created a plan to improve their culture. With consideration of the seven Attributes of Emergenetics, the leadership team identified the steps they would need to take to create a high-performing culture and how their strengths and preferences would help them move their work forward.

To support their success, Amediate provided ongoing coaching using Emergenetics to facilitate communication, adjust how they collaborated and utilize one another's strengths. The team was also able to use follow-up applications of Emergenetics and our industry-first mobile application to navigate honest conversations and spur improvements being made to the workplace culture and productivity.

The leadership team recognized the need to engage their employees in Emergenetics, so they invited all supervisors and program advisors to complete their Profile and participate in the Meeting of the Minds. With the common language of Emergenetics, access to resources and the Emergenetics+ mobile app, the staff was equipped with the tools they needed to become a high-performing organization and facilitate the best outcomes for the residents they serve.

The Impact of Emergenetics

The Department of Family Services at the VDSS believes that the way they do their work is important as the work itself and utilizing Emergenetics helped to improve communication, collaboration and working relationships, which ultimately supported the organization in:

Building a High-Performing Culture – The department has turned around their stagnated performance. They have implemented the practice model, introduced major assistance programs including a new mobile app to support field workers, and passed the latest Title IV-E review.

Improving Retention – Prior to their work with Amediate, the average tenure for a Child Welfare Director had been 14.6 months in Virginia over a period of 11 years. Today, nearly 40 percent of the original leadership team remain five years on.

Supporting Professional Success – The leaders who have departed did so for two primary reasons - a promotion or their retirement. Their high-performing culture has created additional opportunities for members of the team who are regularly asked to share their success stories with others and serve on national boards to support social services.

Supporting Future Success

As government leadership changes and new laws like the Family First Prevention Services Act are enacted, the VDSS continues to be a leader in the government because of its high-performing culture. The team credits their work with Amediate, the utilization and adoption of Emergenetics and our mobile app for facilitating the shifts that have enabled their successes.

Emergenetics empowered individuals to be able to take control of the relationships they had with each other, instead of saying, 'I can't talk to this person. They won't listen. They don't hear me.' The tool and the app allowed us to work together as a team to have a common language for communication.

– Carl Ayers, Director, Virginia Department of Social Services.

Interested in bringing Emergenetics to your organization?
Contact us at: businessdevelopment@emergenetics.com