

CASE STUDY 9: HEALTHCARE

BACKGROUND + CONTEXT

A hospital in a rural town of 30,000 people was experiencing problems with low-level conflict. The hospital provides a wide range of primary, secondary and community health services to the public, which includes a high proportion of aboriginal people. The facility has a staff of more than 600 people comprised of varied professional, support and administrative employees. There were substantial pressures on staff to deliver a broad range of complex services under difficult conditions.

Employees were having difficulty managing their own frustrations at work, and didn't recognize the early warning signs of emerging conflict. They needed to be better equipped to deal with the pressures of the workplace.

Limited communication and conflict resolution skills were hindering their ability to create and sustain a respectful workplace.

THE PROACTIVE RESPONSE

ProActive was invited to deliver its **Respectful Workplace Fundamentals™**: Emotions at Work; Respectful Workplace, Module 1 (RWP1); and Respectful Workplace, Module 2 (RWP2). Training was provided to a mix of health clinicians, administrative staff and management over a four-day period and took place at different times to accommodate shift work and staff support needs.

The first phase of training, Emotions at Work, focused on explaining what emotions are and how they influence behaviour. It outlined a series of simple "emotional intelligence" strategies that help individuals deal effectively with emotions in the workplace.

RWP1 was more informational in nature and focused on creating awareness of issues, while RWP2 provided hard-skills training with the use of ProActive's Straight Talk™, a communications strategy that teaches people to initiate and receive difficult conversations.

It became clear in the sessions that people were having difficulty dealing with problem behaviours. Repeated negative comments, sarcasm, swearing and aggressive talk were reported. The lack of clear standards and expectations had allowed destructive behaviours to become commonplace and individuals didn't know how to address the entrenched conduct.

After discussing a range of these negative behaviours, participants began to formulate lists of specific actions that they could agree to follow to begin fostering a more respectful workplace. The groups recognized that by setting standards for workplace conduct, it was easier to discern where problems stemmed from. The agreed actions were specific, such as "don't interrupt when others are speaking."



The participants then worked through and practiced using the Straight Talk™ model. The impact was positive and immediate.

At the end of the sessions, the participants agreed they each would listen more and be more considerate of others; let unimportant things go; and deal with the real problems around breaking the rules, chronic errors and disrespectful behaviour.

THE RESULT

Since undergoing ProActive's training internal relationships within the hospital have improved dramatically.

Prior to training, communication problems forced management to reschedule shifts frequently as staff could not work cooperatively in groups for long periods of time.

The hospital has since reported groups are working together for several months at a time, effectively communicating to achieve better outcomes for their clients.

The facility manager outlined one subsequent situation involving communication and performance issues amongst an inter-disciplinary team:

"...the ones who had attended (ProActive's) training referred to some of the skills they had learned and applied them to resolve the situation. They went away with a positive attitude (despite the ongoing problems we have had), prepared a response and plan, and then came together with the other key parties to resolve the problem. All parties agreed ... (to) have professional respect for each other. They even agreed on a problem-solving strategy in case there were problems along the way in the future."

PROACTIVE PRODUCTS USED IN THIS CASE

Emotions at Work is an interactive session explaining what emotions are and how they influence our behaviour. Participants learn about the seven basic emotions and the purpose of each emotion. They are then taught a series of simple "emotional intelligence" based strategies that help individuals to deal with emotions effectively at work.

Respectful Workplace Training 1 is an interactive session designed to facilitate the creation and maintenance of safe, healthy and productive workplaces. Organizations and teams learn how to build a workplace free of harmful behaviors. Respectful Workplace 1 is the first step in creating a vibrant, positive workplace.

Respectful Workplace Training 2 is an interactive skills-based session designed to facilitate the development of robust, respectful and professional dialogue in the workplace. Participants learn to apply a conversational framework called Straight Talk that enables one to engage with peers during potentially difficult conversations, in a respectful, professional manner.

