

Mayo Clinic

Background

Mayo Clinic is a world-renowned nonprofit health care organization committed to clinical practice, education, and research. Mayo has approximately 70,000 employees in four major campuses – in Rochester, Minnesota; Scottsdale and Phoenix, Arizona; and Jacksonville, Florida – and a regional health system in the Upper Midwest.

Dr. Gianrico Farrugia, President and CEO of Mayo Clinic, has made joy in work a priority and integrated it into the organization’s strategy. In 2019, Dr. J. Taylor Hays, an internal medicine physician at Mayo, was given the assignment, he said, of “pivoting activities from mitigating burnout to joy in work.” When Farrugia, Hays, and their colleagues found out about the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) Joy in Work Results-Oriented Learning Network, they were excited by the prospect of learning from other organizations on the same journey.

IHI Joy in Work Results-Oriented Learning Network

The IHI Joy in Work Results-Oriented Learning Network (July 2020–December 2022) was a collaborative of pioneer institutions committed to supporting workforce well-being and improving overall quality of care for staff and patients. IHI strives for a future free of health inequities. Our bold vision is that everyone has the best care and health possible. Realizing this vision requires a focus on attending to the joy of the health care workforce. The Joy in Work Results-Oriented Learning Network focused on combating burnout at pace and at scale; provided improvement methods and tools for testing our way to solutions; created a learning system across organizations; and disseminated results and lessons learned.

Approach

To focus on joy in work, Hays formed a team with Eric Cleveland, a practice administrator, and Danielle Teal, Senior Program Coordinator. They decided to begin with small projects that would be funded by a grant program dedicated to joy in work. “For the first 18 months,” Teal recalled, “we said yes to virtually everything.” Ultimately, in this first round, they funded 56 projects.

The team encouraged workgroups to assess their current environments using the [IHI Framework for Improving Joy in Work](#). This process includes gathering input from employees, identifying the impediments to joy, and removing those barriers through evidence-based interventions.

Several projects involved employee recognition. In one initiative, called Joy at Mayo Clinic (J@M), 20 employees were given funds to carry out anonymous acts of kindness for other

employees outside their departments. Recipients would find a token of appreciation at their desks, with a note describing how they contribute to Mayo Clinic’s mission. More than 200 employees have received J@M recognition, with recipients expressing their gratitude for these gestures and reporting increased motivation as a result.

Other projects provided resources and amenities. In the trauma and critical care area, the unit is hectic and the work intense, with staff working lengthy shifts. The team created a roving cart to provide fresh scrubs to any employee who might need them. On Saturday mornings, they also have a cart with hot coffee for the surgeons. “What was incredible was that something so simple brought so much joy,” said Teal.

Challenges

One challenge was ensuring that people had the same understanding about the goals. “There’s still a challenge in getting people to recognize the uniqueness and the value of focusing on joy in work,” said Cleveland. “We’re still in the process of demystifying it.” They have an internal website that explains their perspective, including the formula “gratitude + kindness = joyful experiences.” The website also explains how joy is connected to Mayo’s strategic plan, how individuals can cultivate and sustain joy, and how to connect to other colleagues and find peer support.

Other challenges include finding time to carry out extra projects, especially in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and trying to sustain connections with colleagues under the constraints of working from home and social distancing.

Finally, a major challenge is to transition ownership and responsibility for joy in work away from an advisory council to supervisors, managers, and teams who are prepared to fully integrate the efforts into their work, considering joy as important as any other aspect of the job. Cleveland noted, “For executive teams or leadership teams, joy in work is something they need to own.”

Outcomes

Despite these challenges, Mayo Clinic’s work yielded noteworthy outcomes. From 2019 to 2020, their all-staff survey showed a slight decrease in burnout (remarkable, given the circumstances of the pandemic) and a slight increase in staff satisfaction.

All-Staff Survey Responses

Survey Question	2019	2020
Burnout: Percentage of staff responding that they feel burned out	31%	30%
Satisfaction: Percentage of staff responding that they are satisfied with working at Mayo Clinic	79%	82%

In addition, each project submitted an impact report and measurement analysis that assesses whether the joy-in-work intervention was impactful. These assessments revealed that each project had favorable results, fostering a more joyous culture.

Lessons Learned

One key learning was that simply asking staff, “What matters to you?” is not always enough. That question, said Teal, “can bring out initial surface-level feedback.” She found that it’s more helpful to ask about the barriers to joy.

Other lessons learned include the imperative to deliberately create space for joy to thrive, and the insight that kindness is a surefire way to cultivate joy. The Mayo team has also learned a great deal about methodology from the network, which has helped them approach the work more systematically.

This has enabled them, Hays said, to “drive out the joy crushers that we know are present at work.” Joy crushers, in his view, include the following: “Separating people from our values. Taking credit as a manager or laying blame. Giving people what seems to be meaningless or pointless work. Not allowing people to have any voice in the way they do their work.”

Next Steps

The grant program has approved a round of new projects — 209 are now underway. These include a “funinar,” a four-part program that promotes creativity and engagement. The joy team is also encouraging employees to get outdoors for activities such as hiking and kayaking. And they will continue to “demystify joy” through a joy speaker series and educational modules.

Mayo Clinic will continue to address the challenges presented by the pivot to remote work, which will last for an indefinite period due to the uncertainties of the pandemic and to the advantages that remote work offers. As of now, 30,000 employees are working from home. “How do you create a culture that cultivates joy when you don’t share a space any longer?” asks Hays. “A two-dimensional space is very different than sharing physical space.” One group is developing a wellness and resiliency toolkit to help with this adjustment.

They also want to figure out a way to replicate the experience of working at Mayo in person, said Teal. “The true honor and emotions when you walk through those historic buildings. Greeting a patient in the hallway and giving directions. That’s the core of who we are at Mayo Clinic. How do we do that in different ways?”