The Five Behaviors™

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Permission to Hit Reset

A success story featuring: Acelity™

In 2017, Jane Hart arrived at KCI Acelity as the newly-appointed VP of the Global Clinical Affairs department. As just one department in a medical device company with over 5,000 employees worldwide, Hart's group had a big responsibility—using data to produce studies that demonstrated how Acelity's products worked and where they worked best. And yet, Hart's department drastically underperformed as it struggled to complete even one clinical research study each year.

"For a long while, I would say Clinical didn't have the best reputation internally," remarked Hart, pausing slightly before the word, "reputation." As the Director of Clinical Operations, Anthony Tate, pointed out, the reputation likely stemmed from unhealthy internal conflict within the group, which a lack of communication among coworkers compounded further. As one employee recalled, coworkers received instructions to refrain from talking to cross-functional team members altogether—not a recipe for a productive team. Under these conditions, team fragmentation spread to pandemic levels, productivity plummeted, and turnover increased, causing many employees to feel unsettled.

After consulting with Kelle Hausler, the company's Senior Manager of Global Talent, and two Wiley Authorized Partners to serve as facilitators, Hart decided to utilize The Five Behaviors™ to reorient her teams towards more productive outcomes. Based on Patrick Lencioni's best selling book, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, the corresponding program—The Five Behaviors functions with the simple goal of improving team effectiveness and productivity by teaching individuals how to communicate openly, embrace vulnerability, engage in healthy conflict, and hold their peers accountable.

In highlighting the values and behaviors of Trust, Conflict, Commitment, Accountability, and Results, the program allows teams to engage in difficult discussions that otherwise lead to conflict when avoided.

While the facilitators considered several methods to approach Acelity's unique situation, The Five Behaviors seemed like a perfect fit. As one of the facilitators described her early observations of the department, she and her associate soon noticed, "a lack of trust between people and groups, a lack of accountability, and a strong tendency for coworkers to operate in silos." After making their observations, the facilitators both recommended a two-day Five Behaviors session with an off-site dinner at the end of day one.

With Open Communication, Walls Go Down

According to employees who went through the program, the energy in the room felt incredible. As one facilitator described the initial session, "It was powerful. There was crying. There was emotion, there was intensity, but there were also breakthroughs, encouragement, and celebration." Empowered through this two-day process, individuals discovered their ability to voice their opinions and listen to conflicting viewpoints without feeling attacked personally.

When the team reached the "Vulnerability Activity" during the Trust portion of the course, walls began to crumble as individuals shared stories of their personal lives, asked questions about each other, and chatted with colleagues they'd previously closed themselves off to. "That was one of the most emotional roller coasters we went through because there were some people that really opened up," described one of the group's facilitators. "It helped their coworkers see them as people, as team members, as contributors." The other facilitator recalled that, once the initial participants (including group leaders) showed vulnerability, "That led the way for everyone to become open and share. It was just beautiful watching people break down barriers and learn about one another. It's a multicultural group; a multigenerational group. It was absolutely wonderful watching it." In a matter of days, a formerly hierarchical and reserved company culture gave way to a more open and encouraging environment where healthy, honest, and productive communication flowed freely.

Following the conclusion of the department's Five Behaviors session, employees quickly noticed a renewed sense of trust building among their team members. Chris Aufdenberg, Clinical Data Manager, described the session by saying, "The program gave people permission to hit the reset button." To him, the session encouraged team members to share and communicate openly, especially when confronting uncomfortable situations and areas of tension. As

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a result, group members felt more comfortable and safer around each other, leading to a rise in collaboration and productivity along with it.

When the facilitators returned seven months later to initiate a follow-up assessment, both noticed a drastic turnaround from the state of affairs they first encountered months before. As one facilitator recalls, "We were surprised by how much improvement we saw on the progress report. And then to see the energy and the laughter—you just can't even put it into words." And, while it might be difficult to put the effect of The Five Behaviors into words, the team discovered they can definitely measure the positive outcome of the session in terms of their productivity.

"We're doing four times the amount of studies now that we'd done in the past, and yet our group is not much larger than it was before," remarked Tate. "So, without question our productivity is higher. People are happy to be here. We say 'hello' to each other in the hallway; we see each other outside of work." To Tate, a company can't put a price tag on those values in the workplace.

It's hard to disagree with him, but when a business's productivity drastically decreases due to tension and lack of healthy communication, you can put a price tag on how negative culture affects your bottom line. Faced with these circumstances, acting to change culture becomes a matter of necessity and profitability, not just a luxury. In the case of Acelity, one simple program led to quadruple the output. **Quadruple**.

An Ongoing Relationship for Ongoing Results

Since first leading Acelity's Global Clinical Affairs department through their initial Five Behaviors session, both of the original facilitators have stayed close to the group by continuously checking in, helping the department integrate new members into the team, and conducting follow-up sessions in between. In August 2019, they decided to initiate another Progress Report in order to compare results against the 2018 findings. When the results of the newly-unveiled progress report displayed an all-green triangle (signifying that the department achieved substantial improvement), everyone celebrated.

The Five Behaviors model

Still, Hart's team knew they couldn't take their success for granted as they walked through the report, page by page. But having learned and processed the lessons from The Five Behaviors, the team found themselves well-equipped to have discussions about where they still had room to grow. They could now openly lean into productive conflict as they discussed why some of the responses still showed a need for improvement. Once again, they walked away with action items and commitments that would guide them along what they realized was a continuous journey towards improvement.

As Patrick Lencioni himself says, the concept of The Five Behaviors seems simple, but the process is rigorous. However, this team committed to doing the heavy lifting. And, as a result, they're loving work, enjoying their co-workers, and experiencing the highest engagement scores out of any department within the organization—to the point where employees from other departments want to be a part of their team. While the department acknowledges that the road ahead still has its challenges, it seems the benefits of The Five Behaviors are here to stay, and no matter what obstacles the team encounters in the future, they're ready to handle them.