

How Healthy Tension Helped A Health Care Provider Improve Its Vitals



Snapshot:

Regions Hospital had a proud history, robust centers of excellence, and a strong regional footprint. But to achieve next-level care, they needed to test the limits of Minnesota Nice and discover the value of Healthy Tension within a large executive team.

Regions Hospital in St Paul, Minnesota aspired to be a top hospital in America.

They were starting in a good place. Founded in 1872 in a stone mansion with two doctors, they now maintain five centers of excellence and work with thousands of doctors. Every year, they see 90,000 emergency room visits, 26,000 hospital admissions, and 24,000 surgeries.

If you were to spend three days in any major hospital, more than 100 people will contribute to your care. In such a connected, dynamic environment, teamwork is essential to success. It is essential that everyone in the hospital functions as a part of a high-level team.

A Crowded Table

The hospital itself has a multi-layered structure with many different leaders reporting into different silos. This means that on occasion more than twenty people frequently crowded around the CEO's table. And, because those managers understood the power of visibility, they frequently invited their younger direct reports to present. But rather than introducing leadership to rising stars, meetings became bogged down in PowerPoint presentations. When issues were discussed, a Minnesota Nice attitude—a local cultural style where people withhold opinions which might hurt people's feelings—often dampened conversation.

“Harmony Is The Enemy Of High Performance – It’s Healthy Tension That Accelerates Speed Of Executive Team Decisions.”

- Paul Batz

Regions' leadership needed to align this 24-person team, change the culture, and use precious meeting time to make strategic decisions.

A New Approach

After engaging with Good Leadership's team of professional coaches, the leadership team at Regions made three important changes:

1. They replaced PowerPoints with data-driven, dialogue-based meetings.
2. They discarded Minnesota Nice in favor of Healthy Tension.
3. They learned the importance of investing in one another personally and professionally.

CEO Megan Remark explained that “healthy tension” is “a term for getting the important conflicts out on the table in ways where nobody gets hurt. With such a large team, we needed people to be direct, speak up, and bring supporting data for their ideas. That transformation helped give us better care throughout the hospital, faster.”

In addition to changing the approach to meetings, Regions also implemented Good Leadership's Team Momentum survey. The survey asks questions in six key areas. Is there a compelling plan, clear roles and responsibilities, transparent decision making, and disciplined follow through? And do you move from planning to follow through in an environment of trust and communication?

The key to the survey is that it tracks that buy-in over time, after the initial high fives at the team building session. In the case of Regions, results confirmed that the team remained aligned, committed, and accountable. At the same time, the survey informed Good Leadership's individual and team coaching services. That coaching ensured everyone stayed focused on their top three priorities, while addressing any potential sources of misalignment.

In fact, team scores improved over time as teams learned how to work together, and the alignment persisted, even as executives left or joined the team, signaling a structural change.

“Our Team Needed Me To Adapt My Style To Be Effective At Leading A Larger, More Complex Team.”

- Megan Remark, CEO, Regions Hospital

Remark made changes to her leadership style. “Our team needed me to adapt my style to be effective at leading a larger, more complex team. I became much more disciplined about identifying leadership accountabilities and deadlines (who and when). I found that we made more progress when I intentionally modeled the disciplined approach in others.”

Rejecting Harmony Improved Teamwork

As a result of working with Good Leadership, and embracing data-driven meetings and healthy tension, Regions was able to get their 24-member executive team aligned, committed, and accountable to their goals. When they functioned as one team, they got more done faster and achieved better results.

It paid off. Regions was recognized as a top 50 hospital the last 3 years in a row, and a 2021-2022 Best Regional Hospital by U.S. News and World Report and commended for their Centers of Excellence. Most importantly they experienced less burn out. And their greater focus on the people receiving the care elevated patient satisfaction scores. ■