



# Unleash the Power of Curiosity to Activate Culture Change

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WELLSPAN EPHRATA  
COMMUNITY HOSPITAL:  
A CASE STUDY

# The Situation

WellSpan Ephrata Community Hospital is an American non-profit health service organization located in Pennsylvania. They provide preventative, primary, diagnostic and rehabilitation services, as well as primary and acute care. WellSpan Ephrata's focus on improving safety and quality of patient care, overall patient experience as well as employee engagement and stewardship is paramount to their future organizational successes.

At an organizational level, however, there was a **widespread trend of employees delegating up**. Leaders were falling prey to advice-giving and making decisions on behalf of their staff. This led to a lack of focus and prioritization, making every presenting problem seem imminent, and individuals felt overwhelmed by the inherent ambiguity. Contributors weren't owning solutions to their claims, and this behaviour had become habitual.

WellSpan Ephrata **decided to implement a lean daily management (LDM) system to increase connection, lessen overwhelm, simplify problem-solving and eliminate waste**. With careful thought, they identified tools to support the LDM and drive desired behaviours. What quickly became apparent, though, was that without the ability to be more curious and coach-like in their day-to-day interactions, rooted cultural norms would not budge.

**Edgar Schein's *The Corporate Culture Survival Guide* speaks to three levels of organizational culture:**

- **Artifacts:** things we can see, hear and feel around an organization
- **Values:** things we write or say about an organization, at a formal level
- **Assumptions:** values and beliefs an organization takes for granted

Schein explains there is a crucial need for unconscious drivers of behaviour — which collectively manifest as cultural assumptions — to align with the more apparent and recognizable artifacts and espoused values in order to have a culture that is coherent and strong.

For WellSpan Ephrata, the LDM and the outcomes its processes aimed to support were under threat of becoming merely espoused values. They recognized **a need for methods to enable behaviours central to the organization's values, including their new LDM**.



**Every problem seemed imminent, and individuals felt overwhelmed by the inherent ambiguity.**



# The Solution

**WellSpan Ephrata chose Box of Crayons to activate culture change and help transform leadership behaviours,** so the benefits of LDM could be fully realized, while also improving overall patient experience and employee engagement. The Coaching Habit uncovers the rewards for — and risks of — defaulting to “Advice Monster” mode while creating a reason for people to care about being curious and more coach-like.

By leveraging foundations for coach-like curiosity, leaders were better able to understand how and why they were so quick to intervene with answers and how this behaviour contradicted their organizational values.

**Over 75 leaders representing all WellSpan Ephrata departments participated in The Coaching Habit workshops,** facilitated through in-person sessions. **Executive and senior leadership teams took part in workshops first,** followed by managers with direct reports and then individual contributors.

Once the workshops ended, **learnings were sustained** through access to a comprehensive Booster Shot™ learning portal, peer-based coaching circles called GRAFT and 108 days of mobile text prompts reminding participants to practice their new skills.



**The Coaching Habit ... creates a reason for people to care about being curious and more coach-like.**



# The Impact

**WellSpan Ephrata leaders were early adopters** of Box of Crayons' coach-like questions, understanding the importance of setting an example, and as a result, they would hear the questions repeated back to them in meetings.

Daily huddles, which were initially used to hash out problems, became an effective space to ask questions and transform cultural business assumptions. Managers were better able to concentrate on operational issues rather than constantly “putting out fires.” By using the coach-like questions, team members articulated the real problem sooner and were empowered to be the solution. **When they stayed curious a little longer and rushed to advice-giving a little more slowly,** their ability to become more autonomous both **benefited patient care** and **lifted staff engagement.**

A clinical director for the inpatient nursing unit remarked that, having gone through The Coaching Habit program, her “schedule looks completely different. Where I spend my time has shifted significantly. It is such a relief that I don’t have to solve every problem — I just have to listen and be more coach-like so others are empowered to solve their problems.”

Another nurse gave praise for how coach-like curiosity frameworks engaged and empowered her team when she said, “The program has impacted my ability to coach my direct reports to engage them in problem-solving. The team has expressed gratitude and has shown growth in problem-solving.”

**WellSpan Ephrata’s senior vice president noticed cross-departmental conversations occurring more frequently to solve common problems,** whereas divisions previously would identify obstacles from their line of sight only. Solutions were more collaborative and effective. As a result, they **strengthened their business community and mission.**

Through an employee survey, WellSpan Ephrata identified a **higher level of staff engagement.** This cultural shift meant more than just active and empowered teams that had autonomy to solve their own problems. It also became a key differentiator in the constant battle for talent in a particularly competitive industry. WellSpan Ephrata believed these methods **improved employee retention and curbed burnout, both of which affect the bottom line.**

These practices provided the organization with a way to focus, initiate new dialogues and cement the foundation for behaviours necessary to support their LDM. In working with WellSpan Ephrata, it became apparent that coach-like curiosity was crucial to recalibrating their culture and introducing a new way of being with each other.



**“It is such a relief that I don’t have to solve every problem — I just have to listen and be more coach-like so others are empowered to solve their problems.”**



# The Result

The simplicity of The Coaching Habit methods lent themselves well to the structures of the LDM, and our coach-like curiosity frameworks elevated overall patient experience and employee engagement as well as retention. WellSpan Ephrata saw progressive cultural change due to their partnership with Box of Crayons.

WellSpan Ephrata plans next to **extend workshops to front-line nursing leaders and clinical supervisors**, who are overwhelmed with daily challenges and continue to fall back on providing solutions over asking questions and honing staff development skills.

## “ WHAT THEY SAID ”

“As senior leaders we had to get out of our own headspace as experts and problem-solvers and show vulnerability. We had to let others find their own answers. I realize now coaching is as much a leadership capability as a management competency.”

— President and CEO

“[I have] observed over a third of the GRAFT coaching circles and [have seen] high engagement: staff are having fun exploring the idea of being more coach-like. GRAFT gives them a safe place to role-play and practice with peers.”

— Senior Performance Improvement Specialist

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