

Swaying Employees to Create a Culture Change

City of Salisbury, North Carolina

#Extensive Internal Collaboration

Population: 34,001

Innovation

Criteria:

- Initiative fundamentally changed a process, product or service (fundamental)

OR

- Initiative builds upon existing knowledge to improve a product, process or service (incremental)
- The initiative substantially stretched the boundaries of ordinary governmental operations.

Describe Your Innovation

(When and how did this innovation get started? Do also detail how the program or policy innovative, how it has changed previous processes, products, or services, and how it has substantially stretched or improved the boundaries of ordinary governmental operations.)

The Salisbury Way, or “Sway” idea took root in late 2016 as a group of employees met to try to build on the City’s successful Customer Service Initiative that had been in place since 2005. The Salisbury Way included more than exceptional customer service, our hedgehog principal, it extended into a shift in our organization’s culture. In early 2017 a group of employees from all departments who were diverse in their tenure with the City and their roles in the organization met to begin to define our core values. Focus groups were held at various times to bring in second and third shift employees as well as part-time employees who may not normally have an opportunity to participate. Using the World café model, meetings were held with all employees to have an open, honest dialogue surrounding three questions:

- (1) What does the Salisbury Way look like?
- (2) Why do the Salisbury Way?
- (3) How do we do the Salisbury Way?

Using the results from the focus groups four committees were formed: Communication, Innovation, Employee Engagement, and Awards and Recognition. Employees were invited to volunteer for a committee and four employees were asked to Chair for the first year. Each committee had approximately 20 participants which provided a way for the workload to be shared and for no single employee to be obligated to each event or initiative. In November 2017 the four committee chairs planned a 16 month work plan as a roadmap for how employees would keep Sway moving forward. The initiative received a full roll-out to employees in February 2018 and employees have been engaged and active in the events planned by the four committees. Photographs are shared on City monitors located in every department and the excitement among employees continues to spread.

Collaboration

Criteria:

- Initiative demonstrated engaging stakeholders both internal and external.
- Initiative demonstrated high performance teaming, breaking down internal silos.
- Strategic partnerships and or community networks were developed as a result of the initiative

In less than 200 words, what individuals or groups are considered the primary initiators of your program? How does the innovation engage stakeholders or demonstrate high performance teaming? What strategic partnerships and/or community networks, if any, were developed?

Although the Salisbury Way was initially a goal of our City Manager to bolster our organization's culture and emphasize its integrity and character, the program is employee developed and implemented. The Sway team developed training that all employees, including the Management Team, have participated in and they now provide Sway Cafes (the World Café model) to all new employees on a quarterly basis. The Management Team has been fully supportive and understands that participation in Sway activities is a critical part of an employee's job performance. This participation is just as important as any other task or duty as we provide service to the community. Sway is a perfect example of a High Performance Organization as it uses a parallel organization to make decisions and guide other employees for the expectations we have for each other and how we represent the organization. The partnerships created among the diverse departments represented on the Sway committees has torn down silos creating a high functioning team with members who easily move between roles and departments.

If a private consultant was used please describe in detail their involvement, identify the consultant and/or firm and provide contact information. Maintain a 100 word maximum.

No consultant was used. We initially tried using an outside consultant and the first meeting was a disaster that left employees upset and unsure of what was being asked of them. We determined that we know ourselves better than anyone else, and to build trust between each other the initiative had to be created internally with everyone's input.

Significance

Criteria:

- Initiative addresses an area of concern for the majority of local government organizations.
- Initiative can serve as a model and replicated in other jurisdictions.

Please describe the extent to which you believe your program or policy initiative is potentially replicable within other jurisdictions and why? To your knowledge, have any other jurisdictions or organizations established programs or implemented policies modeled specifically on this project? Please also provide verification of the replication.

This program is easily replicable by other jurisdictions who are willing to give control to its employees and who want an engaged workforce who care about the organization's culture because they helped created it. Any organization that looks to develop as a High Performance Organization can implement the strategy of taking time and involving all employees from all sectors. The employees have to be truly empowered to create a vision and given the means

to implement it. Salisbury's Customer Service initiative was shared and implemented by 10 other municipalities when it began, and the Salisbury Way initiative builds on that program to keep moving the organization forward.

Effectiveness

Criteria:

- Initiative addresses a community or organization need.
- Initiative has achieved tangible results.
- Initiative improved the organizational culture or the traditional approach to problem solving.
- Initiative has received recognition for its achievements, i.e. independent evaluation, national recognition, local press, etc.

Please describe the most significant obstacle(s) encountered thus far by your program. How have they been dealt with? Which ones remain?

The greatest obstacle faced by Sway is reaching established employees who saw the success of the Customer Service initiative when it was implemented in 2005, but then who saw the program become stagnant and the rise and fall of other initiatives as the organization sought to grow and expand. Employees had seen trainings that were fads be introduced excitedly but then quickly lose steam. Getting new employees excited about Sway has been easy, but creating an excitement among seasoned employees has been a challenge. The Sway committees have created new and interesting ways to engage employees and the skeptical employees see the initiative in action. They see the City Manager, the Management Team and other employees fully engaged and slowly they are also being swayed (pun intended) to action.

What outcomes did this program or policy have? Could you share one or two objective measures that demonstrate these outcomes? Ultimately, how did you measure the change based on the intervention, and why do you believe in the credibility of this assessment?

The Sway initiative sought to create a culture shift that we believed could be measured through employee engagement and retention. Employee engagement is at an all-time high. When Sway was rolled-out to employees they were given a Team Salisbury t-shirt or wristband (for those in uniform). Each Friday is Sway Day and employees submit photographs in their Team Salisbury gear. Submission of the photographs continues to grow as other employees participate. Employees are now seeking ways to be involved and are proud of the organization. Our community recently held a festival with approximately 30,000 people in attendance. Employees willingly volunteered to help with the event and worked shifts to ensure the event was a success. Our Finance Director parked cars with a Parks and Recreation aide. Employees were willing to move out of their individual roles and see the large puzzle that their participation completed. There is renewed energy throughout the organization and customer complaints have been reduced while customer appreciation has increased. It's because the employees feel connected to the organization and it has become personal rather than institutional. Employees determined that customer service is what do, but the Salisbury Way is who we are.

Has the program received any press or other media coverage to date? If yes, please list the sources and briefly describe relevant coverage.

The Sway initiative has not received press or media coverage outside of our City social media. We routinely post events related to Sway which are shared and liked on the different media platforms but the message has been internal rather than external.

Presentation

Criteria:

- Presentation will be delivered by a team.
- Presentation will be highly interactive and engaging.

Example Social Media Post

Sway to Go! Salisbury shifts its culture through employee led initiative that defines its service. #SwaytoGo #SalisburyWay #TeamSalisbury #Sway

Please write an abstract or short description for your innovation that would make conference attendees say "Well, I need to attend this session!"

Sway Café: Capitalizing Employee Engagement Conversations!

Sway Café creates an environment of collaborative conversations where participants can glean stories, best practices and ideas around three questions: What is employee engagement? How will we implement employee engagement? How can I improve employee engagement?

Our employees are our biggest asset and we want to ensure their voices are heard. This session will show you how to streamline your efforts and harness your employees' potential for greatness. Join your colleagues at Sway Café, a space created to allow you to speak, think, be creative and CAPITALIZE on the conversations.

How will you make the session creative and unique?- How do you plan to be both entertaining and educational?- Include a description of how your session will facilitate group activities and/or interaction.- What will attendees be able to have as an actionable "takeaway" from the session?

Salisbury would present its Sway initiative using an interactive Sway Café model. We will use the same decorations used in our internal Sway Cafés. We encourage participants to work together to cast their leadership shadow (someone draws the participant's outline on paper) and encourage them to answer the three questions we ask new employees – What does the Salisbury Way (or their organizational culture) look like? Why should it be changed? How will it be changed? Participants can experience the World Café model and take away the group dynamics that lead to a wide range of responses. We ultimately found that no matter who comprised the group going through the exercise the same foundational concepts often prevailed. People want to make a difference and be connected to those around them. We have to build relationships before trust can be built and as relationships improve so does the trust which leads to higher performance and engaged employees.

Anything else you would like to add?