

Attracting, Developing and Retaining Talent Using Leadership Rounding

In this age of disruption, many organizations struggle with high rates of turnover. Common and well-known reasons employees leave their jobs include poor relationships with direct managers, perceived lack of growth opportunities and burnout. By taking time to speak to their direct reports in leadership rounding, leaders can build rapport with employees and learn what's important to them in their careers. This process in turn can help employees feel valued and allow them to make a difference in the organization, leading to higher employee engagement, lower turnover rates and increased employee referrals.

Leadership rounds should be one-on-one, positive, strategic discussions where employees' voices are heard by leaders across the organization.

Leadership Rounding on the Front Lines

Leadership rounds are brief conversations (usually between 5-15 minutes) between leaders and their direct reports using predefined questions to meet specific goals. These goals often include:

- Increasing leadership's understanding of what is happening at the service delivery level.
- Raising visibility and engagement of the leadership team.
- Demonstrating a leader's interest in understanding and responding to the challenges their employees face.

Rounds should be a permanent, regularly-scheduled part of a leader's daily routine. They should focus on building a connection between managers and direct reports, collecting recognition of staff members, identifying what's working well as well as suggestions for improvement, and determining next steps to address any identified issues.

Leadership rounds should not be:

- Tactical discussions about job-related tasks or functions
- Time to catch up on ongoing projects
- Rushed conversations
- Blame- or fault-based conversations
- Public conversations

Instead, they should be one-on-one, positive, strategic discussions where employees' voices are heard by leaders across the organization.

Organizational Benefits of Leadership Rounding

Done well, leadership rounds can lead to:

- Improved communication
- Process improvement
- Increased trust and credibility of leadership
- Improved morale
- Personal improvement and coaching
- Creating a culture where tomorrow's talent wants to work

Improved Communication

Rounding facilitates two-way communication between leaders and their direct reports, as well as leaders and consumers. It allows employees to communicate in ways that might otherwise be impossible due to management layers, organizational structure, silos and other barriers to communication. Leaders can personally reinforce strategic messages, explain rationale behind decisions and discover how initiatives are being interpreted. Rounding focused on a particular program or need reinforces how processes and procedures were designed to work.

Process Improvement

The first-hand knowledge gathered through the purposeful rounding process provides leadership invaluable opportunities to monitor, identify and make improvements. Addressing employees directly puts leaders in a position to hear ideas for improvements that may not filter up to them otherwise. Rounding also provides the opportunity for leaders to observe whether internal monitoring and data collection systems are working and whether the conclusions they are drawing from the data are accurate. Rounding also allows leaders to compare reports, issues and recognition across departments to identify trends, gaps and opportunities.

Increased Trust and Credibility of Leadership

Rounding builds increased levels of trust by demonstrating to staff that the organization's leaders are interested in their day-to-day processes and the quality of their work. They also allow employees to build relationships with leaders while leaders learn what is really important to them. By collecting employee suggestions and following up on them, leaders show that they take employee feedback seriously and care about their contributions.

Improved Morale

Rounding can energize an organization by connecting leaders and employees on a personal level. Leaders come away with a renewed appreciation for the quality and commitment of their employees and witness exemplary behaviors that can be shared with others through recognition and rewards. When people interact spontaneously with shared, open and honest communication, employees can witness the support and commitment of their organization's leadership.

Personal Improvement and Coaching

By taking the time to acknowledge wins and identify areas of improvement, a leader can coach an employee to improve in areas important to the individual's and the organization's goals. Aligning an individual's connection and purpose to the overall organization's mission and goals helps bring value to their work and keep them engaged. If an employee identifies an issue in the meeting, the leader can offer suggestions to empower the employee to address the problem and share how they as the leader can support a resolution.

Creating a Culture Where Tomorrow's Talent Wants to Work

The benefits above come together to create a positive, productive culture that can not only help an organization retain talent but also attract tomorrow's talent. Including current employees in the interview process allows them to share their experiences with potential hires. These candidates can learn firsthand about how involved employees are in process improvement and the recognition they receive for their work and ideas. They can hear about the level of trust and communication between leaders and their reports as well as the targeted coaching employees receive. In this type of culture, current employees can become cultural ambassadors who encourage other talent to join the organization.

Beginning Leadership Rounding

Whether an individual, a department or an entire organization wants to adopt rounding or already has an established framework, a standard approach should be employed. Use the following steps to transform your rounding processes:

- **Set and communicate goals.** Everyone involved in rounding should understand why the individual, department or organization is adopting rounding and what is expected of them in the process.
- **Develop rounding templates.** Leaders should be asking the same set of questions every time they round so that staff know what to expect and can prepare for their rounding meetings. Using the same questions also allows the organization to compare data over time and recognize trends, as well as grounds leaders in following up on the feedback they regularly receive. These questions won't be effective, however, unless all leaders who round work together to write a template that will lead to collecting valuable data from employees. And while it might seem like asking the same questions will get repetitive, remember that employees are only asked to answer them once to twice a month at most.

- **Establish a regular cadence.** Get rounding meetings on everyone's calendars. These meetings should be regularly occurring and prioritized to keep everyone engaged in the process.
- **Create a training plan.** Before rolling out leadership rounding, train both leaders and direct reports on what to expect from this initiative. This plan should include knowledge of the process, the mechanics of the conversation, the post-conversation follow-up process and timeline (whether the answer is positive, negative or neutral), and an explanation of the benefits of the program. Setting expectations up front will help increase employee and leader buy-in from day one and encourage full adoption of the process.

Leadership Rounding Best Practices

The goal of any leader should be to attract and keep great talent and create highly engaged employees. To keep rounding meetings running smoothly and promote a collaborative culture, organizations can utilize the following best practices:

Number Of Direct Reports	Rounding Frequency Per Direct Report
0-15	Twice a month
16-40	Once a month
41-80	Once every two months
81+	Once a quarter

- **Keep all leaders consistently rounding.** Engaging C-suite leadership in this process is mandatory for the success and staying power of an organization's rounding program; however, anyone with at least one direct report should make rounding a regular part of their routine. The recommended frequency of a leader's rounding depends on how many direct reports they have.
- **Always follow through.** By capturing staff feedback in a regular way, whether through a spreadsheet or another form of standardization, leaders can track the recommendations they receive and ensure they follow up with each one.

Closing the loop on staff recommendations, even if the answer is no, improves morale and encourages further communication because staff members understand that the organization values their input. If the leader does have to reject a suggestion, they should be sure to explain why (budget restrictions, the suggestion is not in the organization's best interest, etc.).

- **Highlight wins.** Ask employees for recommendations of coworkers who have gone above and beyond and give them recognition and/or rewards. Create contests and give awards (honorary or monetary) for top rounding departments. Be sure to also give recognition to those employees who give valuable feedback and suggestions for process improvement during the rounding process, highlighting any wins for the department or organization. When employees feel that they can impact the organization and be recognized for their work, they're more likely to be engaged.
- **Offer additional, targeted training.** Some people are naturally more gifted at communicating with others; leaders who possess this talent will likely be more effective and comfortable in rounding straight away. For leaders who may struggle with one-on-one communication, the rounding templates can be especially helpful to start the conversations, but you may need to offer additional training. Don't be tempted to allow individuals who struggle to stop rounding or to bring in someone else to round for them; these actions can impair the building of trust between managers and their reports. Instead, empower these leaders to develop their rounding skills and their interpersonal connections.
- **Be proactive.** A common challenge for rounding is leaders believing they don't have the time. If leaders wait to address an issue until it's an emergency, they end up treating the symptoms of the issue and not the root cause. By learning about issues in rounding meetings and proactively addressing them while they're small, leaders ultimately save time by not having to put out major fires later.

- **Be positive.** Every employee needs to receive constructive criticism at some point to work on their areas of opportunity. Following a 3-to-1 rule of acknowledgements and appreciations to criticisms can help keep employees engaged and have them make the most of their constructive feedback.
- **Share data.** Employees appreciate honest, transparent communication. At leadership meetings and daily huddles, leaders should share what they're finding with the broader organization as well as take the time to highlight wins and recognize people. Measuring progress against goals and sharing results with the organization drive motivation to continue to work toward realizing team objectives.

Summary

Rounding fosters open, two-way communication that's not restricted by silos, reporting structures or access. Successful organizations depend on effective leadership at all levels, and rounding can provide insight and validation into what leaders need to make informed decisions and drive cultural change. In addition, it can inspire leaders at all levels to innovate and identify new opportunities for increasing performance and business process improvement. All the while, employees develop connections with their managers and get their voices heard, driving improved engagement to help the organization build a culture that enables them to attract, develop and retain top talent.



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