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# A Pathway for Positive Change

## The Genesis Medical Center Story:

*Even in the midst of dire circumstances, you can create a positive mindset at your company — one that will help your people, your customers and overall performance. When is the best time to start implementing positivity at work?*

*Most likely right now.*



**The Happiness Advantage | Orange Frog Workshop™**, used to increase engagement, build resilience, and spread optimism, was honored as the **2021 ATD Excellence in Practice Award Winner – for Change Management**

# Executive Summary and Results Overview

When there is negative news everywhere you look and unprecedented financial and logistical challenges facing so many companies, it can be tough to advise people to stay positive. Many leaders we work with worry, especially now during the global pandemic, that trying to emphasize positivity and happiness will make them look out of touch — and rather than helping their people, it will backfire.

The findings from our multi-year research project at a hospital system in Iowa indicate quite the opposite. It's precisely in the midst of a setback or challenging time that leaders should be actively encouraging positivity because it will help teams weather the storm.



Three years ago, Genesis Health System, which is comprised of five hospitals and a regional health center, was not profitable. This was true for many hospitals which were experiencing the lowest profitability since the 2008 financial crisis. Consequently, few leaders at Genesis were talking about happiness at work and Jordan Voigt, president of the largest medical center (Genesis Medical Center-Davenport), was facing a conundrum. He wanted to infuse more positivity into the culture at the medical center, but they were about to undergo two rounds of massive cost reductions and layoffs. In addition, they were asking staff to reduce their hours and take time off with or without PTO.

Still, he felt it was important to focus on the company's culture and hypothesized that positivity could help the center at this crucial time. We worked with the medical center to roll out a series of positive psychology interventions department by department so we could test the effectiveness compared to groups that had not been exposed to the interventions. Each department designed positive changes tailored to their subculture spanning from gratitude exercises, increased praise and recognition from managers, and team-based conscious acts of kindness.

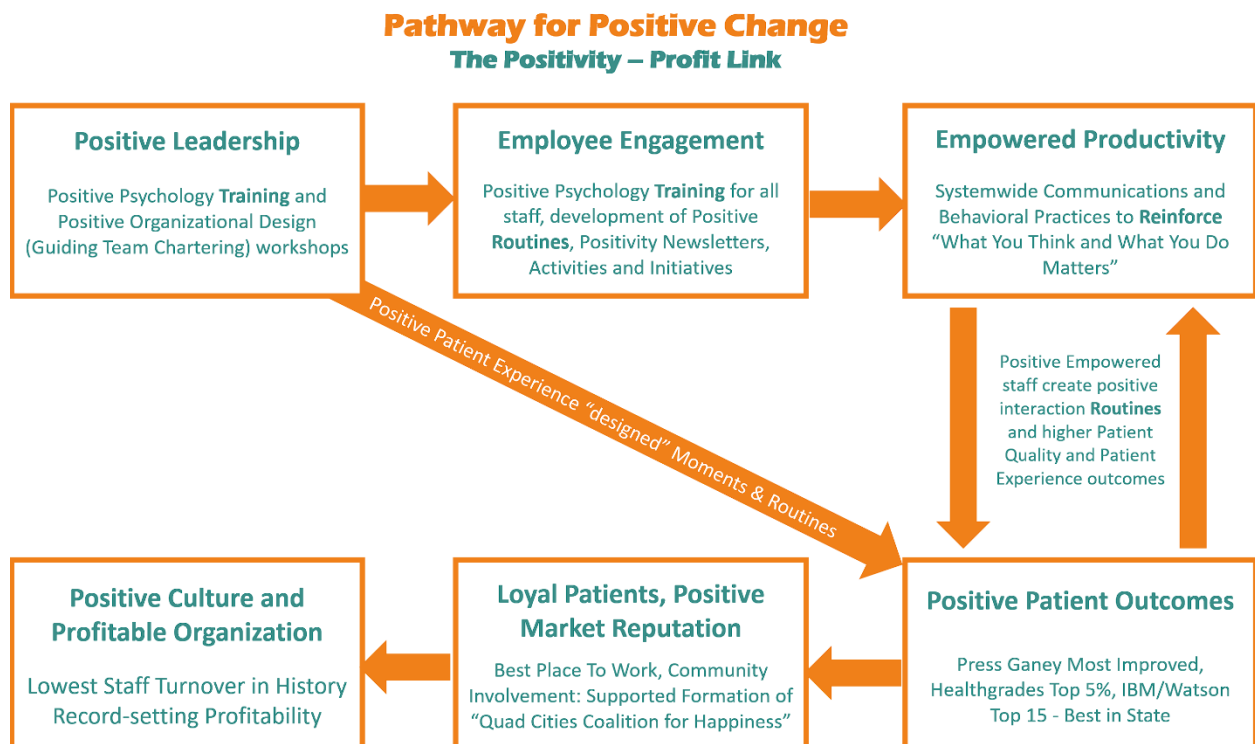


- Optimism levels increased from 23% to 40%.
- Happiness at work measures increased from 43% to 62%.
- Individuals reporting high stress levels showed at 30% reduction.
- Individuals reporting burnout decreased from 11% to 6%.
- Individuals reporting “I feel connected at work” increased from 68% to 85%.
- Intervention participants feeling that the organization was going in the right direction was 63%. vs 37% for those who had not yet participated in the program.
- Those reporting:
  - When there is uncertainty at work, I expect the worst. Disagree went from 39 to 51%. I feel empowered at work went from 53% to 74%.
  - I feel energized went from 54% to 75%.
- The Endoscopy Department: vacancy rate went from a 35% to 0% over six months.
- Registered Nurses vacancy rates dropped to 2.9% vs 15% prior to the practice/intervention.
- Quality & Safety improvement recognized in 93 percentiles in 2020.
- Patient experience rates nearly doubled within a 12-month period of the intervention.
- Over the initial eight-month period of the intervention, monthly patient reported Willingness to Recommend scores increased by 66%; with trending increases correlating closely to the month-over-month increase in the percentage of staff completing our positive psychology training interventions.
- Following the intervention, the medical center achieved profitability again and exceeded their operating budget by 35%.
- The medical center was recognized by Press Ganey as one of nation’s most improved medical centers for performance.
- The center recently set a revenue record of \$105 million in gross revenue in a single month.
- The organization remains is the #1 position for market share its service area.



# The Genesis Story Details

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## Why A Pathway for Positive Change?

This practice was established when our leadership decided that amid tough times and impending challenges, the employees they were responsible for, and cared so much about, should have a better workplace environment – one which could help improve their personal life. They also wanted to create a way for a highly diverse workforce, with many job functions and skill levels, to connect more deeply and work together to improve patient experience which was the key to better financial results and a more stable future for everyone. Herein “A Pathway for Positive Change” was born.

We then established a systemwide intervention with the idea that increasing positive engagement could support the outcomes we desired for staff and patients. The impact has been real for staff and patients, the results significant. Pairing efforts to create a positive culture with new habits and new norms of behavior successfully drove adoption. We’re all storytellers, to ourselves and others. People were looking for positive experiences to relay and remember. They connected motivation to meaning, joy to work, and optimism to desired outcomes. In many cases, these positive behaviors begin to define the rewards themselves, not the other way around.

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*Patient experience nearly doubled within a 12-month period attributable to the decision to pursue positive change amid tough times when, arguably, employment satisfaction and engagement could have easily gone the other way. We believe it worked, in part, because of how we led it, reinforced it, and allowed positive behaviors to become the new norms throughout the organization.*

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Three years ago, the organization was not profitable. This was also true for many healthcare providers, which were experiencing the lowest profitability since the 2008 financial crisis. We were about to undergo two rounds of massive cost reductions and layoffs to lower operating costs by \$34.5M. In addition, we were asking staff to reduce their hours and take time off with or without PTO.

Moreover, we were requesting that staff work in entirely different ways and to float to other areas where they may not be as comfortable. In the midst of this belt tightening and focus on cost reduction, plans also called for significant new spending on necessary growth opportunities like cancer care and treatment, all of which had potential to create serious confusion and disengagement among staff.

We felt we needed a solution to pre-empt and buttress the negativity, dis-engagement and attrition that was bound to ensue, and which inevitably accompany major staff and budget reductions and significantly disruptive change.



## The Needs Assessment Process

From the needs assessment we gained key awareness of what successful practice outcomes would look like relative to patient experience, employee engagement and market share for various stakeholders including: patients and prospective patients, doctors, nurses, staff, students and interns, formal leaders in the organization, and the communities we operate in.

Practice leaders then hypothesized an outcomes-based approach connected to our business objective. It was: if we can improve people's job satisfaction, they will be more engaged, and produce better outcomes (like patient satisfaction), which leads to increased loyalty and profitability.

Among the third party research we evaluated in the process of developing our hypothesis, research done by Frederick Reichheld of Bain & Company shows that increasing customer retention rates by 5% increases profits by 25%-95%. Moreover, the American Psychological Association found that "psychologically healthy workplaces" have 21% lower turnover than the U.S. average, as well as 21% higher employee job satisfaction. And in its 2017 State of the Global Workplace Report, Gallup reveals the tremendous value in the 15 percent of the global workforce that is engaged – highly engaged business units are 17 percent more productive and 21 percent more profitable than disengaged business units.



## What the Process Revealed

### In terms of patient experience and market equity:

- We needed patients to feel more welcomed and have a sense that the medical center was a good place to work; to see better staff collaboration and feel important. They also wanted to feel more in control of the care they were receiving. Without such “take-aways” or perceptions, they were not likely to recommend us highly or make us their provider of choice.
- Senior leadership wanted to be able to tell the organization’s story proudly, leading with high patient experience and satisfaction scores to reference; to be able to share accolades and metrics that would deepen community connection, supporting a stronger enterprise in the future.

### In terms of employee engagement:

- Staff needed to feel valued, especially nurses; to feel like valued members of the care team which the majority did not. To believe what they thought and did mattered, to care more, to get more involved. Translated, we needed greater, more effective social connection and engagement to foster trusted working relationships that would lead to better collaboration between staff and physicians who understood the shared outcomes they supported.
- Students (medical school, nursing, etc.) needed to feel welcomed so that they had interest in joining the organization and could “see themselves” as future employees. They also needed motivation to participate more, to take more initiative, to feel a part of the provider team.

### In terms of communication:

- We uncovered that in communicating, our “Social Scripts” were negative and needed alignment/improvement to accomplish our desired changes.



## The Design Process

Once practice leaders felt strongly about our needs and that identifying a solution for change that could impact both employee job satisfaction/engagement *and* patient experience alike, an internal champion brought forward research supporting the potential impact of positive psychology interventions in the workplace.

In our evaluation of the data, such interventions have been shown to improve both employee and customer related outcomes providing a clear and proven link between a healthy workplace for employees and patient experience. Results included: increased employee productivity and engagement, higher sales and profitability, high creativity, less stress, and more satisfied customers.



In particular, **Shawn Achor** talked about fostering positive leadership in periods of significant change, training your brain to develop new positive habits, and the benefits of social support in sustaining happiness and well-being. His research and travels extended to over 50 countries including nearly half the Fortune 100 companies, as well as places like the Pentagon, impoverished schools in Africa, and the White House. It also included substantial research in education and the idea of “creating resilient cultures” where resource depletion, compulsory performance requirements and high stress levels create near industrywide angst. We felt this was healthcare, and that was us, too.

Our senior management team and practice leaders then spent two months reading and discussing Achor’s book ***The Happiness Advantage*** in a weekly book club study-group format to fully understand positive psychology. After doing this work and discussing possible solutions in the context of our own needs – we decided to initiate, in a strategic and highly visible way, a positive psychology intervention.

We began by piloting a two-day positive psychology training for senior executives and management followed by a facilitated debrief and three-day chartering session to explore and align our challenges and desired outcomes relative to employee engagement, patient experience and market share/reputation with actionable positive psychology initiatives, that if we successfully implemented, could likely create and sustain the desired impact.

We created a guiding operating charter, as follows:

- “If we truly create positive moments for our patients and *treat them the way we would treat our own families* then patients will make us their first choice for receiving healthcare.
- If we provide *real support for each other both personally and professionally* we will all feel better about our time together at work... *and*
- If we always seek to make a *positive impact on our community’s wellbeing*, we will become a valuable member of the community and increase our presence in the region.

With clarity of our objectives and an understanding and commitment of the organizational and senior leadership support required to enable success for the practice, we then shared our guiding operating charter with medical center and department leaders, and selected staff, to explore and examine how to possibly change existing work



routines in their area to apply positive psychology principles to create higher levels of engagement, teamwork and collaboration internally and with regard to patients care and experience.

We now felt prepared to move into the design and delivery of our interventions.

**To create the foundation and conditions (framework) for lasting change, Genesis focused on:**

- Embedding the core principals of positive psychology into our belief systems and work routines
- Establishing environments that supported systemic learning providing everyone new opportunities to capture a wider range of experiences
- Making positive customer-centric experiences (patient and staff) everyone's responsibility
- Changing social scripts to align with our intended outcomes
- Engaging people in ways that improving performance fuels and fosters interconnected success

**The main components of the intervention included:**

- (1) **Training.** The roll-out of a two-day positive psychology training called **The Happiness Advantage | Orange Frog Workshop**. This experiential workshop teaches the science of positive psychology based on the seven actionable principles from *The Happiness Advantage*, supports developing new positive individual habits, and provides the needed belief system, common language, and new skills for participants to reach higher levels of optimism and engagement together.
- (2) **New Work Routines.** Department leaders, with staff involvement, were tasked with examining how to change existing work routines to create more desired behaviors and outcomes such as starting meetings with three positives adopting a praise and recognition program, and team-based conscious acts of kindness. Each department designed positive changes tailored to their own sub-culture.
- (3) **Reinforcement.** Reinforcement included: (a) Ongoing leadership roles and expectations for the chartering team in support of the intervention, (b) internal and external communication plans to highlight successful initiatives, reinforce desired social scripts and share key learning, and (c) 90-day action plans established to manage and measure key activities.



## Collaboration and Communicate with Key Stakeholders

The sequence of collaboration progressed from: 1) identifying stakeholders and their connection to patient experience, employee engagement and market share, 2) establishing key brand characteristics – narrowed down to authentic, approachable and invigorating fun – to guide how the practice wished to be perceived, and the tone and scripting of messaging about the change effort, 3) mapping pathways to reach stakeholders with multi-channel communications, 4) development of communications plans, and 5) 90-day plans for each stakeholder group to track activity and impact.

The stakeholders ranked most critical to communicate with were patients, nurses, students, prospective patients, and service leadership.

The president personally kicked-off every training. In his communication, he connected the intervention to the organization's goals and presented it as the key to success in not only weathering the financial pressures and cost reductions but also in creating positive change. He publicly evidenced his commitment to the intervention and affirmed happiness as a priority. Externally, he appeared in a regional business magazine with two orange frogs on his suit shoulders. He edified the work of the practice importance in everyone's mind.

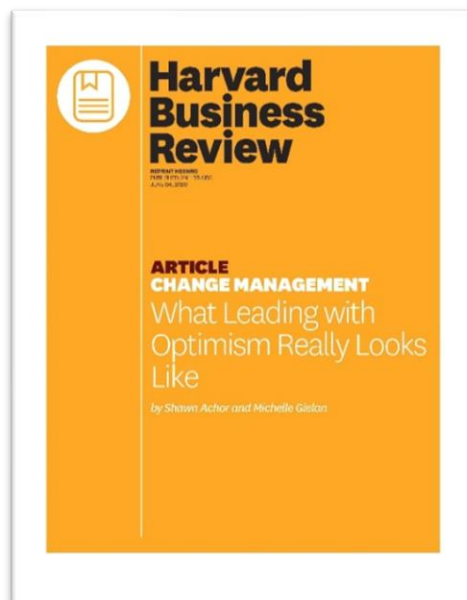
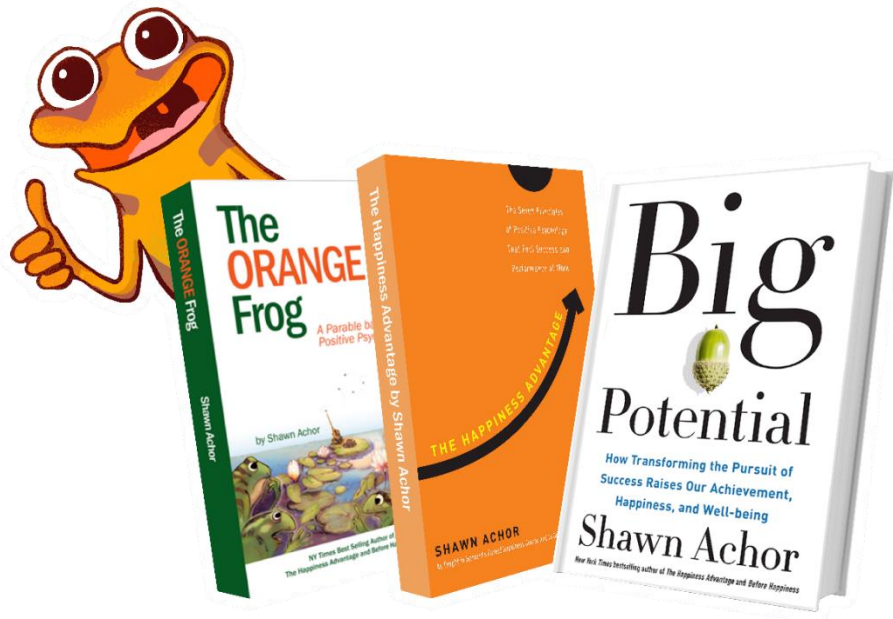
The organization adopted the color "orange" from the parable *The Orange Frog* (a pre-read for the training) to symbolize positive changes. For example, in some departments, people returned from vacation to find their offices covered with words of appreciation on orange post-it notes. The practice team bought caterpillars for every department and together released the Monarch butterflies after they hatched as a symbol of change. When moms had babies, the staff gave siblings plush orange frogs called baby Sparks\* as a symbol of the kind character of the department. Employees received a Spark\* Award for spreading happiness through kind acts. *\* Spark, the main character in the book, chooses to be positive outlier.*

### The evaluation process:

We primarily evaluated learning efficacy through use of traditional survey methods pre and post learning. It is important to note two things. First, the intervention training was rolling and ongoing so that economic/seasonal changes are not responsible for these results (because some of the post data was collected at the same time as pre for other groups). This eliminated the argument that maybe positive change is occurring because more time has passed. Second, the post-intervention data wasn't collected the day of an upbeat training. We waited four weeks after the training so that any "intervention high" was gone. We also waited for nearly a year's worth of research to come in before analyzing the data. We actually thought it was possible that the negative external pressures would depress or eliminate any potential positive change from the intervention.

Actions always speak louder than words. We often seek evidence by rounding and walking around throughout the organization. Sometimes this is the best 'evaluation' process we use because it provides insight into what is really happening with our employees and patients. At our organization, leader rounding is a requirement; Administration has provided dedicated time from 9:30am – 11:00am Monday through Friday where no meetings are scheduled. This is time to allow leaders to go out and spend worthwhile and genuine time with their employees and patients. Even our volunteer Board of Directors rounds. It's during this rounding time that stakeholders and leaders observed the practice's impact come to life. The training was impactful, beginning with *The Orange Frog* parable pre-read in preparation of attending the workshop. Then once departments began embedding learning into their work routines the impact of the practice had a dramatic, noticeable impact. During rounding, informal communications and

check-in's affirmed both commitment to the practice from all areas of the organization and allowed for active knowledge sharing of initiatives and best practices going on in other areas of the organization.



## Organizational Objectives Achieved

*The practice supported and achieved the organizational objectives it was designed to meet. The outcomes are highlighted below.*

### Patient Experience

- Over the initial eight-month period of the intervention, monthly patient reported Willingness to Recommend scores increased by 66%; with trending increases correlating closely to the month-over-month increase in the percentage of staff completing our positive psychology training interventions.
- Patient experience rates nearly doubled within a 12-month period of the intervention.
- An anesthesiologist actively carries two orange frogs in his scrub jacket inviting patient questions and allowing him to talk about how it is a symbol for optimism and enhances his personal happiness and why that will yield higher quality of care for the patient he is talking to. This anesthesiologist achieved the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile in patient experience for ambulatory surgery national percentile comparison based on patient encounters from February through April 2019.

### Employee Engagement

- For the individuals who had not yet been exposed to the positive intervention, only 23% of the team members reported they were “very expressive of optimism at work.” That jumped to 40% after participating in the training (measured six weeks after the intervention).
- In the midst of the massive organizational changes, the percentage of respondents who reported that they were happy at work went from 43% to 62%. Individuals feeling burned out “often” dropped from 11% to 6%. Individuals reporting “high stress at work” dropped by 30% after they participated in the workshop. Social connection improved as well. The number of respondents who said “I feel connected at work” went from 68% to 85%. This was after staff reductions where some coworkers and friends were no longer at the organization.
- *When there is uncertainty at work, I expect the worst.* Disagree went from 39 to 51%. *I feel empowered at work* went from 53% to 74%. *I feel energized* went from 54% to 75%.
- In the parts of the organization that had not been part of the intervention, only 37% of respondents claimed the organization was going in the right direction, compared to 63% in the groups who went through the intervention.
- The endoscopy department, which was known to be toxic with a 35% vacancy rate, now has regularly scheduled potluck lunches — and a 0% vacancy rate over six months.

### Market Share/Financial Impact

- Following the intervention, the medical center achieved profitability again and exceeded their operating budget by 35% during the first half of 2019, going from an operating loss of \$2M to a profit of \$8M.
- The medical center was recognized in 2019 by Press Ganey as one of nation’s most improved medical centers for performance and six months into the fiscal year increased total operating revenue by \$15 million or 8.7%, while expenses increased only \$1.9 million or 1.1%.

## New Behaviors that Resulted

Besides developing new habits to shift into positive mindsets and learning new approaches to overcome adversity and challenges, specific new behaviors that resulted from the practice were around (1) socially connected learning, and (2) making change and improvement part of the routine way of doing our work.

- (1) **Socially Connected Learning.** We knew that people do not typically make positive organizational changes alone or in isolation. Also, that a positive mindset at work is often a collective exercise because the behaviors and attitudes are reinforced when a group does it together. Our emphasis as a practice was on participants developing positive habits, brainstorming new work routines, and discussing culture together in groups. This allowed participants to take ownership over the new mindsets, routines, and ways of working. Beyond the workshop they now create new social scripts in real time connecting these changes to purpose, verbalizing the significant impact their happiness and positivity can have on their patients.
- (2) **Making change part of the routine of doing work.** As a practice, we didn't just tell people to be more positive, we worked with them to create patterns that reinforce the positive. It's hard in the midst of stress to invent new ways to be positive, so creating regular patterns as a department help sustain the positive without having to call on new brain resources. In some areas, it was as simple as routinizing celebration. For example, the endoscopy department, which was known to be toxic with a 35% vacancy rate, now has regularly scheduled potluck lunches — and a 0% vacancy rate for over six months. Some departments' leaders set the routine of starting all staff meetings with each person saying one thing they're grateful for. Some have areas where people can post thank you notes or pictures of successes so that any staff or patient walking into that department is given a dose of visual positivity.

Many new behaviors related to social connection and embedding positivity into work routines have resulted from our implementation. We have hundreds of examples. Below are a few:

The Medical/Pulmonary Nursing Unit – the unit purchased orange medical gloves and nursing colleagues on that unit will request a co-worker to wear orange medical gloves if he or she is not being positive. Often this creates an inquisitive question from a patient on the rationale for bright orange gloves, which naturally brings a smile to the staff members face and changes the outlook for that staff member.

**Anesthesia** – one anesthesiologist carries around an orange frog within his scrub pants and speaks to patients on the power of positivity and how it allows him to deliver better care, before sedating in advance of a procedure. He is in the 99th percentile nationally for patient experience.

**Visual Management** – most departments have adopted their own branding and messaging such as, “Be like a Proton and be Positive” (a lab), “Our Registrars are Ribbiting” (Patient Access), and “Our Care Assistants & Behavioral Health Techs are Hoppin” (Behavioral Health).



## How Sustainability has been Achieved

One of the many reasons that ***The Happiness Advantage*** was selected to support our practice agenda was because of sustainability. The story of ***The Orange Frog*** is memorable and the characters in the story are easy reminders of the characters within each of us, and the people we work alongside of each day.

Visual aids, i.e. the color orange, posters throughout the medical center, the workshop completion pin, are daily reminders of the tactics learned on our journey. The shared experience of the workshop and the common language did, in fact, promote sustainability.

Recently, with the COVID pandemic, we created several ways to sustain tactics learned from the practice. At the beginning of the medical center's response to COVID-19, our CEO stressed the importance of "caring for our own" and supporting our colleagues. We created the C3 COVID-19 Compassion Campaign, led by a diverse team of colleagues charged with spreading compassion and supporting health care workers during the COVID-19 outbreak. This response is directly tied to our culture, and the mindset learned from our practice.

C3 asked for employees to serve as compassion companions to partner with colleagues throughout the organization to check on one another during periods of consolation and isolation. They developed a compassion station, where businesses provided free products or tended to other needs so people could focus their energy and resources on the care of the patients. We are using journaling positive/good moments and creating space to share with our nursing team who are exhausted caring for complex COVID patients. Our organization was trained and prepared because of our positive culture and the work of the practice and staff to own it. Today we are making it through a pandemic and a devastating derecho because our focus is on the positivity embedded in our culture.



## Other Positive Outcomes

One benefit achieved is the interactions between staff, administration, and physicians. Instead of walking down the hallway and just saying “hello,” they now look each other eyes and smile. We see physicians interacting with staff in a more causal manner. We see co-workers, correcting each other by stating, “that wasn’t very Orange.” We have learned the power of interconnected success, and this has helped us all row the boat in the same direction.

In terms of market share, we found out that a) more physicians want to practice here, and b) the local community has made the decision to choose care at a medical center that embraces, symbolizes, and actively promotes positivity as a core value.

Also, quality & safety have improved substantially, reaching the 93rd percentile and supporting national recognition as Top 15 national health system in 2020.



**The Happiness Advantage | Orange Frog Workshop** has become the largest and most successful positive psychology training program for organizations in the world. The only evidence-based offering which started in the classroom at Harvard, and whose research has now extended to over 50 countries.

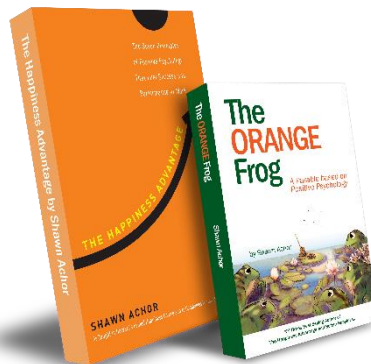


This experiential workshop teaches the science of peak performance based on the seven actionable principles from *The Happiness Advantage* and provides an engaging sustainable approach to enhancing productivity at the individual, team, and organization level.

Research in positive psychology has shown that a positive mindset results in **23% greater energy in the midst of stress, 31% higher productivity, 19% higher accuracy, 40% higher likelihood to be promoted, up to 10 times more engagement**, and improves our overall longevity. Organizations implementing The Happiness Advantage | Orange Frog Workshop are consistently able to:

- Create and sustain a more optimistic, adaptive, and resilient workforce through the power of positive psychology
- Create a catalyst for organizational transformation
- Develop a workplace culture that embraces positive change efforts
- Increase employee engagement, resilience, and optimism
- Increase staff satisfaction and retention
- Decrease staff burnout while increasing productivity

The program impacts every dimension of human potential - performance, intelligence, creativity, leadership ability and health – in an increasingly interconnected world where our biggest potential lies in our ability positivity to influence others.



For more information on the workshop, certification, and related resources, go to  
**[www.OrangeFrogExperience.com](http://www.OrangeFrogExperience.com)**