



## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

# The Change Gang: Adopting a Disruptive Culture



**W**e've all heard it: *Why do we have to change? This is the way we've always done things!* Change is difficult, even for those of us who embrace it. But it is especially difficult for non-owner employees.

After all, why welcome the discomfort and uncertainty of change if there is no upside to your personal bottom line? This is perhaps one of the biggest challenges we face as the urgent care industry matures and competition for a finite number of patients increases. If we don't differentiate, we die. But getting everyone on board with disruptive change is a difficult task.

Perhaps the most important first step we can take is to develop a mutual understanding that change is necessary.

Setting the tone for an adaptive and innovative culture starts with a conversation about the future and the challenges to continued success in a rapidly changing business environment. Our staff understands that we are dependent on our patients as consumers of healthcare and can certainly comprehend the need to adapt to their evolving preferences. They also understand that we are competing with others for their business.

It can help to start the conversation with a little history. When urgent care first came on the scene, there was a pent-up demand for access to healthcare. Some forward-thinking physician entrepreneurs made up the bulk of the early growth in urgent care by addressing the access issues. The mere availability of healthcare at convenient times and locations was enough to attract large numbers of patients. Everyone was happy, and business was plentiful.

Fast forward to the last 5 years and access is no longer an issue. There is an urgent care on every corner, a retail clinic in every pharmacy, and even an inexpensive video consult available from every phone. Even traditional healthcare has entered the fray, making primary, specialty, and emergency care more patient-centric and accessible. Access is of little value anymore. Now the industry is focused on providing superior service and efficiency with more sophisticated operations, technologies, and other innovations to serve an increasingly demanding clientele. Everything about the urgent care encounter is now ripe for disruption, from navigation to registration, payment to care coordination; it's all under review. And despite what

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some might declare, nobody knows for certain which levers to pull for success. This is where we have to get our staff comfortable piloting ideas, with all the flexibility and patience that comes with it.

Once your staff understands the necessity for change, soliciting their suggestions will help them feel like they are an active part of the evolution, rather than victims of it. The practice leader's job is to set the stage, identify customer dissatisfiers, and then enlist the staff to help solve the problem without any boundaries for ideas. Consider the way we historically welcome our patients to their care encounter: "Driver's license, insurance and credit card...please." Now go sit down, fill out a lot of redundant paperwork, and then *wait* until we privilege you with our care. Not the most inviting way to show we care, but this is how we've done it forever. You can't change it now! Or can you? You will be surprised by the creative energy your staff can demonstrate when you enlist them in the process. You may even ask them to rank the ideas based on cost, feasibility, and impact. If you can choose at least one of these ideas to pilot, you have successfully engaged your team in the process of disruptive change and given them a sense of ownership and responsibility for its success. Suddenly, they are leading on their own, willingly embracing what they once bemoaned.

Urgent care is at a crossroads and the status quo is not going to get the job done. Creating a disruptive culture that generates enthusiasm for change and staff ownership will help propel your urgent care down the challenging roads ahead. ■

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