



Case study: The benefits of investing in self-discovery – a manager’s perspective

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As the Head of Quality Governance and Professional Standards for East Kent Adult Services, Karen Kessack is responsible for identifying where quality improvements are required and supporting her staff to plan and take effective action. Looking at her own career, Karen has consistently pursued roles where she could make a meaningful difference. As a Registered Adult Nurse and a Specialist Community Public Health Nurse SCPHN (SN) she gained first-hand experience working with patients. In her nursing roles and in her later managerial positions she has always sought to improve patient care and derives satisfaction from seeing her work make a positive contribution. Managing the development of her staff is an important part of Karen’s day-to-day work and something she takes great care with. She is very aware that often individuals will prioritise managing patient care over managing their own careers, but she also knows that the investment of time in staff development is important to the individual, their teams and the NHS.

Prioritising people (alternative heading: Focusing on people)

The NHS is a large organisation and it is easy for individuals to get caught up in their day-to-day job and lose sight of how their role fits into the bigger picture. As Karen points out, there are some people that show an interest in developing within or beyond their current positions. For these individuals Karen always utilises her wider network and understanding of the organisation to help them access the information, resources and people they need to expand their skills or take on new challenges. There are many others that have as much capacity for development, but do not know how to go about understanding where they are on their career path and where it could possibly take them. Karen was very conscious of the huge potential that may go untapped within the organisation and saw the Self Discovery workshop as a perfect fit for so many of those individuals *“working busy frontline jobs they don’t take a breath to think about what they want to do going forward.”* She started by recommending it to members of her staff who she thought needed the time and space to step away from their jobs to look at their careers. The feedback Karen received from staff was universally positive, summed up well by this attendee: *“The self-discovery workshop was really insightful. It gave me some perspective about the kind of leadership style I aspire to as well as tools to use along the way. By far one of the best study days I have had the opportunity to attend”.*

Practical and focused

As a one-day workshop, it is more accessible and manageable for individuals and their organisations and it offers attendees time away to focus on their own development where they can fully engage, work with and learn from people with similar challenges. In addition, the workshop provides participants with the opportunity to connect with individuals in other locations and disciplines and help build awareness of possible career paths. The day is well organised, insightful and provides practical guidance on where further assistance and resources are available. It encourages participants to take ownership and develop their careers – whether they are finding it difficult to make a specific decision or have never given any significant time or thought to where their career could take them. An attendee observed that *“the course helped me look at my own values, what was important to me in my work and how this motivated me.”*



Positive experiences and meaningful impact

Unlike mandated training or clinical courses, the workshop is all about the individuals themselves and presents a rare opportunity to demonstrate their value to the organisation. Over the day, many of the attendees start to understand their career journeys to date and gain some perspective of where their career could take them in the future. Some may already be evaluating alternative directions and the workshop helps them to focus. For others, it is the first time they have really invested in their own development. For the organisation *“it’s all about future proofing our services by developing staff to reach their true potential”*.

The workshop is instrumental in helping staff take the critical next step. There have been some who have gone on to apply for the Mary Seacole programme to develop their knowledge and skills in leadership and management. Others have developed as leaders within their own roles. In one instance an attendee in an administrator role returned from the workshop with a clear goal on where she wanted to go and quickly progressed from Band 4 to Band 7. The workshop benefits both the participants and their managers and leads to more collaborative and engaged approach to development across the organisation.

The CQC inspection report received in July 2019 rated the East Kent Adult Services as outstanding. This is a significant achievement for a community health organisation and a testimony to the calibre and commitment of the staff. With a greater emphasis on self-discovery, individuals display greater confidence in their roles. This has led to improved communication and more effective team performance and ultimately contributed to greater quality in patient care. *“If you want to get the best out of your staff, they need to understand the direction they are taking and where they want to go with their journey.”*

Endorsement

It is not just Karen who is an avid supporter of the workshop, previous attendees are vocal advocates and strongly recommend it to their peers. Recently Karen was working with a group tasked with developing Band 6 staff. The professional lead nurse in the group had previously attended the Self Discovery workshop and found it so beneficial that she recommended it is included as part of their staff development programme.

Recommending the Self Discovery workshop is a win/win. Karen recognises the considerable potential in the staff that she manages both directly and indirectly and how this one-day investment in individuals helps them focus on their career and where their skills and potential are best matched. The outcomes ensure that Karen, as a manager, gets the best from her staff and individuals have a greater job satisfaction as they find themselves in the roles they aspired to. These individuals also benefit from having a greater understanding of their longer-term career goals - and how to achieve them.

Supporting staff and their development is an essential element of a manager’s role. Focusing only on upskilling staff in their current role, misses the opportunity to identify and nurture true potential. The Self Discovery workshop takes a longer-term view and challenges the individual to focus on their career journey. Attendees are empowered by their experience and come away with a deeper focus on their current and future roles – leading to better results for all.

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