**A Look Back and A Look Ahead**

Looking back at 2020, one of the additions I have made to my repertoire during the pandemic is to listen to more podcasts while walking, cooking, etc. This week I listened to a podcast on LinkedIn with the prolific author, Adam Grant. He spoke about some of his take-aways from 2020. He mentioned using the experience of last year to “go back and interview teams for reentry. What have we done that’s worked? What is the most surprising lesson you’ve learned by working from home? What would you like to reinvent based on these lessons?” Poignant and insightful, I believe we should all take his lead and do the same. This inspired me to take stock of 2020 and review what worked and what needs modification.

One of the adaptations to the way business was conducted pre-COVID was the notion that most HME employees did not work from home. Today, it is common to talk to HME staff from their home offices while their dog barks and their kids pop “in” to say hi and share their lap. Granted, many employees are in the office, making deliveries to patients’ homes and working in the warehouse, etc. However, others are pounding away at their keyboards from their bedroom, living room or basement office space. A quick rebound on switching staff from their desktops at work to their dual screens/laptops at home with internet was no small feat for most HME companies. Yet, it is now common to find staff group chatting on Slack and on screen Zoom/Teams meetings. With resounding resilience, business has continued and often flourished, making it look seamless to the patient community. One company I spoke with said they have improved productivity by more than 5-10% during the pandemic.

With that in mind, I started to rethink the way I conduct business. From non-stop travel - planes, hotels, rental car booths, and more, I found myself like a fish out of water in March. When I called a client with whom I was scheduled for an on-site visit in April to tell him I doubted I would be there, he queried: why not just try this via Zoom or similar? Not only were we able to turn employee interviews to a virtual platform, we were able to visit with far more people than if I had been rushed to catch a plane. Rather, we took our time and visited with almost 100 employees before finishing the project. The extra time meant delving far deeper into the order to cash process and it became apparent that we could provide more service and product by doing so virtually. I learned that with patience and flexibility, we would plow through the process and consequently, we finished the project with much better knowledge of staff, automation and processes. Our key take-away was that we could continue to offer our consulting services without physically coming to the office.

Not only did remote consulting engagements keep me busy during 2020, scheduled in-person presentations became virtual and conventions were creatively designed to hold break out rooms and virtual show floors. They even had places to leave messages for attendees and virtual cocktail hours with bands, etc. Was it the same as meeting in person? Of course not! But it was better than the alternative and it kept me engaged. It was so nice to see old friends, even via Zoom.

In addition, articles still got written, and mentor and coaching calls still happened. In fact, it was clear that people needed more check-ins, coaching and advice than before. This was uncharted territory and those that learned to stay in constant contact with their teams and provided releases and perks for employees found that they achieved improved productivity and collections exceeded budget. I too enjoyed connecting with people with whom I wouldn’t have had the chance to meet with if I had been on the road constantly.

As 2021 brings hope for a healthier year, congratulations for all you have done in the HME provider community to fill the referrals’ needs and for the risks you have taken and continue to take to serve the HME patient population. Lucky are those who receive your services.

Thanks for entrusting me with your staff and I will continue to look for ways to reach out and learn and teach along the way.

Happy New Year!

Miriam