



# THE WINNING STRATEGY FOR PHYSICIAN ENGAGEMENT

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A PLAYBOOK  
FROM HLI

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## How Engaged Are Your Physicians?

Though doctors neither receive nor pay for a hospital's services, they are among a healthcare organization's most important customers. And, as with any organization's customers, physicians' level of engagement with a hospital is vital to its success. Here are the four levels of customer engagement, as developed by Gallup researchers. These levels apply just as surely to doctors as they do to customers of any product or service:

**Fully Engaged** physicians are the most valuable to a hospital. They have a strong emotional bond with the organization and have a loyal attitude.

**Engaged** physicians have an emotional bond that is less strong, and they feel less loyalty toward their organization than their fully engaged counterparts.

**Not Engaged** physicians are emotionally and attitudinally neutral. They have no positive association with the organization.

**Actively Disengaged** physicians have an active emotional detachment from the organization and are antagonistic toward it.

Imagine a world of healthcare where every physician is engaged and contributing with their full capacity. A world where physicians are happier because they feel listened to - a world where every physician is a leader.

Physicians are the lifeblood of healthcare organizations. Engaging them in leading transformation is critical. Many healthcare organizations do worry about alignment, but few take the time to establish an end-to-end strategy for developing physicians, let alone create an action plan for physician engagement. Much potential is lost without this commitment. In a report by Deborah A. Paller called *What the Doctor Ordered: The best hospitals create emotional bonds with their physicians.*

Recent Gallup Organization studies of more than 6,000 physicians in the United States show that only 10% of physicians are fully engaged with their hospital, while 42% are actively disengaged.

Although it's intuitive that physicians who are engaged with a hospital would prefer to practice there, this assumption is proven by several case studies that demonstrate a clear linkage between physician engagement and referral patterns.

The result is better financial performance at the hospitals where these physicians practice. Physicians may also believe that their employers don't often ask for their input.

## **HLI'S STRATEGY FOR PHYSICIAN ALIGNMENT AND ENGAGEMENT**

### **1. Listen to your Physicians**

Ask the right questions on an ongoing basis and listen to understand. Thoughtful questions are crucial tools for ongoing assessment of engagement. Questions must be asked with physicians in mind as people, not just clinicians. To build trust in this dialogue, you must intend to give physicians a voice, listen to what they have to say and act upon it in a cycle of continuous improvement. Know their top concerns!

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## **HELP PHYSICIANS SEE THE BIG PICTURE**

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### **2. Help physicians see the big picture. Take time to explain the "why" behind initiatives, and describe what success looks like.**

Administrators spend too much time speaking to physicians about WHAT to change and not enough time providing the context of WHY to change it. Communicating the idea simply and clearly, like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s messaging, is critical to success. For more info, read our work on the four steps to great leadership communication.

### **3. Empower Physicians with knowledge and skills.**

Provide physicians with education on how to lead. Physicians need skill-building on how to address change and conflict in healthy and courageous ways. Other essential development includes strategies for identifying and preventing burnout, appreciative inquiry techniques, adaptability to change, and resilience. We can help you build these skills while applying the learning to real-world challenges. This experience and reciprocal trust-building is directly linked to increased physician satisfaction and engagement, improved organizational alignment, and improved quality and safety metrics.



# HLI'S STRATEGY FOR PHYSICIAN ALIGNMENT AND ENGAGEMENT

## 4. IDENTIFY AND REMOVE HASSLE FACTORS

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**Walk in their shoes.** Physicians will bristle at what they perceive to be a lack of understanding by administrators regarding what their work is really like. Walk alongside your physicians. Round with them. Sit and talk to them, one on one. See and hear their challenges, firsthand. Have them identify their hassles and create plans to remove or neutralize them. Even removing one hassle or obstacle will build trust and goodwill. You can't afford not to do this.

## 5. CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

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**Actively engage physicians in your organizational strategy!** Collaboration is a muscle that must be exercised. Create intentional projects for administrators and physicians to work on together. Ask physicians to lead in areas like patient experience, readmissions, and reduction of outcome variations.

## 6. TRUST AND EMPOWER PHYSICIANS TO LEAD

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**Trust physicians to lead and empower them to do so daily as your organization's primary agents of change.** Physicians value peer communication and accountability. Developing physician leaders from those in the trenches improves engagement and trust building.

### **HLI trains and certifies physician change agents that:**

- **Lead with Purpose:** Understand the scope and purpose of change and can explain it to others.
- **Lead with Strategy:** Can assess the cultural and human barriers for change and devise an adaptable strategy for implementing a change effort.
- **Lead Others through Influence:** Understand the dynamic of change in individuals and organizations and plan to influence stakeholders and gain their support.
- **Lead Self:** Demonstrate optimism and agility to lead change.
- **Lead for Results:** Transform resistance into engagement and anchor the change in the culture.



## 7. COACH YOUR PHYSICIAN LEADERS FOR SUCCESS

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Provide coaching to support your physician leaders. Leadership is not taught in medical education and residency, and supporting your physician leaders through coaching is a proven strategy. Coaches increase physician self-awareness, effectiveness, and bridge the gap between ideas and execution to deliver results. We have an elite group of coaching professionals and a suite of evidence-based tools to serve in this capacity.

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**ALIGNMENT AND ENGAGEMENT DO NOT HAPPEN OVERNIGHT! A DELIBERATE STRATEGY AND PRACTICE USING THE STEPS ABOVE WILL PROVIDE YOU WITH THE TURNING POINT TOWARD THE TRANSFORMATION YOU SEEK, AND IT CAN BE ACHIEVED THROUGH A STRATEGIC COMMITMENT TO PHYSICIAN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT.**

# WHERE TO START

We recommend beginning with this Physician Alignment and Engagement Index from the Advisory Board Company to gauge your physicians' current level of belief in each element:

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## Alignment Index

1. I prefer to admit and/or refer my patients to this organization
2. I would recommend this organization to other clinicians as a place to refer and/or admit their patients
3. I am willing to serve this organization in non-clinical roles such as positions on committees

## Engagement Index

1. This organization inspires me to perform my best
  2. I am willing to put in a great deal of effort in order to help this organization succeed
  3. I would recommend this organization to other clinicians as a great place to practice
  4. I am likely to be practicing with this organization three years from now
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For more on the winning strategy for physician alignment and engagement, we invite you to ask us about what we have identified as the upcoming paradigm shifts in healthcare and how to thrive amid these changes.

***“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act, but a habit.” - Aristotle***

Together, let's make engagement a habit.



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**DO YOU HAVE A  
STRATEGY? IS YOUR  
STRATEGY WORKING?  
WE CAN HELP!**

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Strategy often makes the difference between success and failure. With our strategy consulting, HLI focuses on helping clients articulate a strategy map, guiding and empowering an organization to focus on the critically important aspects of business, while eliminating time spent on the non-urgent, less important aspects of their operation.

While strategy planning is considered an annual event by many organizations, HLI focuses on strategic thinking as an ongoing process of translating vision into reality. Using our unique **Terrain Based Strategy™ (TBS)** planning system, we enable individuals, teams, and organizations to explore extraordinary opportunities by creating dynamic, responsive strategies that align environmental trends with organizational goals.



**STRATEGY**



# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

## MO KASTI FOUNDER & CEO, HLI

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Mo Kasti is a distinguished author, thinker, speaker, strategy advisor and family man.

His passion centers around helping executive and clinical leaders elevate their thinking in times of transformation and capitalize on emerging growth opportunities.

When terrains are shifting, and outcomes are uncertain, Mo is uniquely equipped to help leaders think outside the box. He is sought after for his expertise in leadership, strategy, innovation, and organizational/cultural transformation.

With more than 25 years in healthcare, Mo is an expert on healthcare leadership and engagement. He is the author of *Physician Leadership: The Rx of Healthcare Transformation* on the transformational effects of leadership in medicine and *Beyond Physician Engagement: A Roadmap to Partner with Physicians to be ALL IN!*

Mo is the CEO and founder of CTI and the nationally recognized Healthcare Leadership Institute dedicated to accelerating healthcare transformation through leadership and innovation. HLI has converted thousands of clinicians to clinician leaders and improved outcomes for hundreds of healthcare organizations and their patients.

# CONTACT US



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