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**LONG CREEK YOUTH DEVELOPMENT CENTER  
MANAGEMENT REVIEW**

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## **BACKGROUND**

The office of the Governor and Commissioner of Corrections Martin Magnusson requested that we conduct a management review of the Long Creek Youth Development Center (LCYDC) to assess the current and near future management needs of the facility and to determine whether the current superintendent meets those management needs. LCYDC has undergone significant change in a relatively short time period, and it seemed an opportune time to step back and evaluate the leadership and direction of the facility.

## **METHODOLOGY**

We interviewed staff at LCYDC as well as people outside the facility who have a stake in its success. The staff interviewed represented all levels including upper management. In some instances we identified criteria for the person to be interviewed (position held, years of service) and the names were given us by LCYDC staff. A total of 31 interviews were conducted over several days both at the facility and in Augusta.

All interviewees were assured that their names would not appear in our notes in order to encourage openness and assuage any fears of retribution. We are confident that a wide representation of positions, time at the facility, age and gender were represented, leading us to feel comfortable with the patterns of information that did emerge.

Each interview commenced with a short discussion about purpose and confidentiality. We then asked the following five questions:

- What is your position with or interest in LCYDC?
- How have the changes over the past five years affected you professionally and personally and how have you observed others being affected by the changes?
- From a management perspective, what do you believe are the strengths and weaknesses of current management processes and practices?
- If given full authority and a “magic wand”, what changes would you make at LCYDC?
- In the real world, where would you like to see LCYDC in two years? Five years?

These initial questions led to probing and clarifying questions related to responses to the five questions. Each person was then asked to review a list of twenty leadership behaviors or competencies (Attachment A) and rank them in groups of five based on what the interviewee believes is necessary for the facility at this point in time in order to achieve what s/he had articulated as a two and five year vision. They rated five behaviors as critical, five as very important, five as somewhat important and five as least important.

## RESULTS

Since the results of the above exercise completed by interviewees were important to our overall findings, they are shown in graphic form below. The respondents indicated the five most critical leadership attributes for LCDYC at this time, in descending order, to be:

- Building two-way trust
- Making timely decisions
- Developing employee confidence in management
- Having and sharing a vision
- Working from a strong ethical base

The first chart in Attachment B demonstrates how many people felt that each attribute is critical. The second chart in Attachment B broadens the view of the needed leadership qualities to include both the critical and the very important, with nine that clearly stood out above the other eleven. These are, in descending order:

- Developing employee confidence in management
- Building two-way trust
- Making timely decisions
- Building a team environment
- Communicating effectively
- Having and sharing a vision
- Working from a strong ethical base
- Creating consistent policies
- Inspiring people

## FINDINGS

First and foremost we want to note the incredible changes that have taken place at this facility. As someone who has been visiting the facility on and off for over 20 years, one of the reviewers is astonished by the differences in the facility today versus only a few years ago. These differences are evident in the physical plant, staff attitudes at all levels and, most important, in the residents. We saw residents in a clean, safe, secure environment receiving mental health treatment, quality medical care and improved educational opportunities being treated with respect by a caring staff.

As a preface to our findings, it is important to begin this discussion with a word about the Superintendent. Almost without exception, the people interviewed had many positive things to say about Lars Olsen. Many credit him with taking a dangerous and abysmal facility and creating one in which rehabilitation and treatment is valued and the culture supports the needs of the residents. Under Mr. Olsen's leadership, enormous changes have been put into place that will likely result in Long Creek Youth Development Center

becoming a national model for youth correctional facilities. He even possessed the courage to hire a person with strong change-agent abilities and allowed this person the freedom to implement major changes that had strong opposition from many staff, but were ultimately seen as positive and a source of pride. A lesser person would not have allowed another person to shine at his own expense, particularly when that person was implementing another's vision for the facility. Regardless of whether Mr. Olsen continues his role as Superintendent, he deserves praise and recognition for his accomplishments under difficult circumstances. Person after person told us that, if not for Mr. Olsen, there would not be a new facility, a new culture and a new future for Long Creek Youth Development Center.

It is clear to both of us that LCYDC has been through enormous change in the last five years or so in both quantity and complexity, so much so that it is difficult for outsiders to fully appreciate. It would appear that what LCYDC needs now and in the near future is someone at the helm who can consolidate the gains since many, if not most, of the changes are incomplete or still have rough edges or areas that lack clarity. Working to build a team environment, with everyone understanding the new mission and the processes and methods to attain that mission are critical. In short, people need to catch their breath and become confident in all of the new methodologies as well as the policies and processes that support them.

The following findings are based on information gathered in interviews, personal observations, review of documents and our own expertise in the area of leadership and management competencies.

### **Finding One**

Lars Olsen, while possessing some strong and admirable skills as a manager, is not the person to lead LCYDC at this time. Virtually none of the people interviewed, including those who admire him, felt that he could return to the Superintendent's position. In reviewing four years of labor management meeting minutes, it became clear that by May 2003, there were irreconcilable differences between labor and the Superintendent which ultimately led to a vote of no confidence in the fall. Too much has happened at Long Creek that can't be undone, requiring a new person and a fresh start. However, he could obviously continue to make a contribution from another position within the department. His vision, dedication, and commitment to children would be of great benefit in this time of change.

### **Finding Two**

A national search should be conducted for a new Superintendent with candidates measured against the nine competencies identified in Chart 2. It is essential that this be done with all due speed. The "limbo" status of current leadership is not serving the residents well, and to the extent that hiring a permanent Superintendent is delayed, more good staff could potentially be lost.

### **Finding Three**

There are two clear divisions in upper management at LCYDC. These divisions are profound in that they reflect core philosophical and methodological differences in how the facility should operate. So deep are these divisions that one camp seems, at times, to actively work against the success of the other camp. Staff tend to be grouped as to which camp they are in, creating an “us vs. them” environment and further diminishing the effectiveness of upper management. Worse, some people spoke of the “open disdain” that many staff have for a small group in upper management. This intensity of feelings can not be ignored. Central office must immediately develop strategies to resolve this problem if LCYDC is going to realize the success that is so close at hand.

### **Finding Four**

In part due to the dichotomy in upper management referenced above, there is an imbalance of responsibility, particularly in the number of people and/or programs reporting to individuals. Unfortunately, the practice at the facility appears to be, at least with upper management, to isolate those whose performance is seen as lacking by removing responsibilities. This creates not only an imbalance of responsibilities but an obvious absence of accountability and perceived unfairness by mid-management and line staff which further erodes staff respect for management. In restructuring the hierarchy at LCYDC, it is vital to create appropriate reporting relationships and hold upper management accountable.

### **Finding Five**

The mid-management level at LCYDC also needs examination in order to create a more efficient organizational structure. While our work has not gone far enough to make specific recommendations, some of the issues we have identified as needing further exploration are: 1) Lack of clarity or boundaries within certain aspects of the functions of the Juvenile Program Managers and the Facility Operations Supervisors; 2) Additional support and accountability measures for Juvenile Program Managers, some of whom may lack management skills, are not sufficiently trained and/or are unclear on the larger mission of the facility and their role in it; and 3) The number of hierarchical layers for the size of the organization.

### **Finding Six**

A significant number of employees interviewed regaled us with stories of line staff being reprimanded, or worse, when the same offense committed by management is ignored. Claims of disparate treatment are not unique to this facility or, for that matter, to state government, real or perceived. The frequency and intensity of these claims by LCYDC staff is, however, unusual and warrants attention by upper management. This is particularly important at this time, when the need to build trust is so very critical.

### **Finding Seven**

During times of change, confusion and turmoil, it is not unusual to find high staff turnover. We were told that LCYDC has lost 177 line staff in the last four years. The new Superintendent needs to pay particular attention to exit interviews in an effort to determine why good people have recently left. This could assist in identifying short-term goals that, if accomplished, could help stabilize the facility.

#### **Finding Eight**

The Chairperson of the Board of Visitors is also a long-time volunteer at LCYDC. He is passionate in his commitment to helping the youth and to supporting the positive changes to the facility. Unfortunately, he is also unintentionally undermining management's ability to make some of the changes that are so needed at this time. His regular reminders to staff that he has a direct line to both the Commissioner and the Governor are contributing to a perception that the Superintendent isn't really in charge and creating fear and distrust. It is critical that this person's role be very clear, both as a volunteer obligated to follow the same rules as all volunteers and as the Chairperson of the Board of Visitors.

#### **Finding Nine**

The position of Clinical Director has been vacant since September, leaving Clinical Services leaderless. This is another area that requires immediate attention with either the hiring of a new clinical director or of a strong manager with the skills necessary to assure that this critical area is consistent with and contributing to the overall mission of the facility. Further, all individuals with clinical responsibilities must be held accountable for the clinical mission.

#### **Finding Ten**

Central Office was cited by several interviewees as taking a "hands-off" approach toward juvenile corrections in general and Long Creek in particular. There are, of course, good reasons for giving an institution relative autonomy, just as there are times when an institution in crisis needs support. Central Office must determine, given the competencies of the Superintendent, how much or how little overt support is needed in the initial year or so.

While this completes our findings, there are several issues that we heard so often that we believe they need to be considered as LCYDC moves forward.

- Some of the gains that need to be consolidated involve education, aftercare, community reintegration, treatment and other critical components of the entire system from intake to discharge. Intake to discharge must be seen as a system rather than a chain of interconnected, but independent, programs.

- LCYDC is essentially fully staffed, and its resident population is significantly smaller than in previous times. Given these conditions, it's not surprising that many of those interviewed say too many staff are "not working very hard". That is, they watch television, constantly ask to leave early, or otherwise shirk duties. This kind of behavior is always difficult on those picking up the slack, especially if these people are frequently absent or "out sick".
- It appears that late afternoons, evenings and week-ends are the high-need times for mental health and related issues to arise. So, just when residents most need skilled clinical staff (who mostly work normal business hours), they are going home.
- Positive outcomes such as declining recidivism, emphasis on treatment and rehabilitation and substantially reduced use of the SMU and restraints speak well of the efforts made by all at the facility. While recognizing that this is not the kind of information that generates news reports, it is still a story that must be told. This is not to say that these, and other positive outcomes, counterbalance any negatives that may have occurred. Instead, we find a high level of staff frustration and a sense of unfairness concerning what is happening to Mr. Olsen and, by implication, their place of work – in essence they are feeling "beat up" for all their hard work. Ways to send the positive message to all stakeholders and the general public need to be explored.
- There is significant consternation among staff due to the inconsistent application of policies and procedures among the residential units at LCYDC. While managers and supervisors will have their own unique way of working with residents, there needs to be consistency when the result is the punishment of a resident. Many examples of minor infractions in one unit receiving significantly harsher penalties than a major infraction by a resident in another unit.
- Many of those interviewed voiced concerns about the apparent "separateness" of Support Services staff. While the focus has been on integrating the program and security staff, support staff remain largely unconnected to the mission and, therefore, not held appropriately accountable.
- Most of those interviewed expressed fear that some of the "old guard" might come back into leadership positions during this chaotic time of transition. Many believed that if this should occur, the facility would regress to a more punitive environment. While it appears that there is majority support for the current environment, this fear was expressed often enough to warrant attention.

We would like to reiterate how impressed we were with the positive direction being taken at LCYDC and with the caring and commitment of the facility staff at all levels. We remind the reader that it would be a rare organization whose management practices contained no shortcomings if closely examined by outside management consultants. The



above findings should be construed not as criticism, but as ideas upon which to build a more effective management structure.

ATTACHMENT A

LONG CREEK YOUTH DEVELOPMENT CENTER  
SUPERINTENDENT COMPETENCIES

- A – Critical
- B – Very important
- C – Somewhat important
- D – Least Important

1. Taking the initiative to meet staff needs whether resources, access, responses, or information.
2. Developing innovative responses as the need arises,
3. Focusing attention toward internal and external “customer” satisfaction measured in results/outcomes, not activities.
4. Making timely decisions and effectively communicating them to appropriate people.
5. Creating coherent and consistent policies.
6. Building and maintaining employee confidence, trust, and loyalty.
7. Exercising judgment as to what is best for the facility and those it serves.
8. Building strong communication (written and oral) links among all functions.
9. Providing distinctive quality services.
10. Building and maintaining a team environment.
11. Planning and organizing daily work.
12. Developing and protecting employees to, in part, raise morale and retain staff.

13. Demonstrating personality traits which mitigate adversarial relationships, stubbornness, inaccessibility, and aloofness.
14. Possessing negotiating skills.
15. Possessing a strong ethical base.
16. Taking the initiative to identify problems and issues, and taking direct steps toward resolution?
17. Creating and sharing a vision of LCYDC with all staff.
18. Building two-way trust between the administration and others (e.g. managers, line staff, residents, union, parents, etc.).
19. Inspiring staff, volunteers and service providers toward excellence.
20. Demonstrating strong interpersonal skills.

If there are management behaviors that you feel are important but are not reflected here, please feel free to add.

# ATTACHMENT B

