



Carolinas HealthCare System's Journey to Revamp Its Mission & Vision Statements to Better Represent the Heart of the Organization

Our culture journey started long before I joined Carolinas HealthCare System (CHS). Like all organizations, CHS has a vibrant history and a deeply-rooted heritage that have collectively helped to shape and mold us into the organization we are today – one I am proud to lead day in and day out.

At the same time, I'm a true believer that an organization's culture is a living and breathing entity. Our culture is represented by each teammate, each member of our governing bodies and each interaction we have with our patients – every single day.

I make this point not only to emphasize the importance of staying true to our roots, but to also give credit where credit is due – the process didn't begin with me. In fact, if I'm going to share the full story of our recent culture transformation, the narrative rightly starts with the members of the *CHS Board of Commissioners (BOC) and Board of Advisors (BOA)*.

Crossroads in the Journey

As with any journey, there are always opportunities to re-evaluate your destination and the route you've mapped to arrive there. Sure, you can change course or forge a new trail at any time, but a crossroad is an essential moment to pause, re-evaluate, and, if needed, navigate the organization in a new direction.

For CHS, one of these moments arose in 2015, when its longtime CEO, Michael Tarwater, announced his retirement after 14 successful years leading the system and more than 35 years of overall service to the organization. As you can imagine, the appointed search committee had many options. Recounting the process, Ed Brown, CHS Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, and Al McAulay, Chairman of the Search Committee, recall how daunting the task was, aware that “the things that got us here will not be the things that get us there.”

“Staying true to who we are as an organization, we knew we needed a servant leader who genuinely cared about our people, our patients and our communities,” Ed said. “At the same time, we needed to find the right person to take us to the next level, and we found that balance in Gene.”

Without hesitation, I can say that the feeling was mutual, and the culture at CHS was one of the top reasons I decided to join the family. Few organizations are as committed to the patients and the communities they serve as CHS is, and with a personal passion for engaging better with our communities to advance positive health outcomes, I knew this was the place for me.

Mission & Vision: The Reason We Exist

It's no secret that the health care field is experiencing historic and rapid change. As we continue to work together to support a shifting care model, governing bodies across the country are now asking many hard questions, including if their mission and vision statements are still relevant. While this was certainly part of the equation for our cultural restoration, it wasn't the foundation for change.

To me, a mission statement is a simple, clear and individualized definition of why you exist as an organization, and a vision statement should highlight what you aspire to become. In fact, during my very first week at CHS, I set out to answer these questions, distributing a survey to our leaders and asking them for their input about what make us unique as an organization and to share with me their future vision for CHS. I spent months touring the system, listening to and engaging with teammates and learning firsthand about the true heart and soul of our organization. Did our mission and vision statements represent who we are, and did teammates identify with them?

As you can imagine, this was an eye-opening process, and I was overwhelmed by the spirit of our organization. Teammates across all levels and geographies share a sense of family and have a deep connection to one another and our patients. Each of our teammates strives to be the first and best at what they do – caring for everyone, no matter their background, appearance, where they come from or if they can pay. What did I learn? There was a depth of caring and passion that bound our 65,000 teammates together, but our *mission and vision statements* didn't quite match this spirit – both had just become words on the wall. To me, this discovery became the building block of my responsibilities as president and CEO – we needed to redefine our mission and vision statements to better reflect the heart of the organization as well as our future.

Former Mission Statement:

“To create and operate a comprehensive system to provide healthcare and related services, including education and research opportunities, for the benefit of the people we serve.”

Former Vision Statement:

“Carolinas HealthCare System will be recognized nationally as a leader in the transformation of healthcare delivery and chosen for the quality and value of services we provide.”

When we started to rework the mission and vision statements, we considered the broadest possible range of feedback. We incorporated the insights from my tour, the survey results from our leadership team and, most importantly, the hundreds of stories that teammates shared with me. These stories really demonstrated who we are as a system and how our collective work makes an impact on the lives of our teammates, our patients and our community.

While distilling these ideas into just a few words was certainly no small task, very clear themes emerged. *Health, hope* and *healing* floated to the top, and an underlying work ethic to be the first and best in everything we do resounded true to our identity.

Think Bigger

Unique to our approach, rather than just overseeing the process, we set out to have the board actively participate in reshaping our mission and vision. Once we had developed a concrete concept for our new identity, we called together a special meeting to brainstorm with and incorporate the feedback of the board. Something incredible happened as part of this process – they pushed us to think bigger.

The original draft of our mission statement was as follows:

“To improve health, elevate hope and advance healing.”

With deep ties to our history and as leaders in the community, the board knew we were missing a key piece of our identity: providing care for everyone: “For all.” These two simple words represent so much of who we are at Carolinas HealthCare System, and the conversation that fortified this language started with the board.

When it came to our vision statement, this was our original draft:

“To be the first and best choice for care in the Southeast and beyond.”

A good vision statement should serve as a guidepost and it should allow for growth. Our meeting with the board pushed us to realize that this vision statement wasn't aspirational enough: We could dream bigger than the Southeast and beyond, so we removed the geographical limitations.

In December of 2016, just seven months after joining CHS and starting the process, I was proud to announce to our teammates that the Board had officially approved our *new mission and vision statements*.

New mission statement:

“To improve health, elevate hope and advance healing - for all.”

New vision statement:

“To be the first and best choice for care.”

As a team, the energy around our new identity continued to grow, and in March of this year, we celebrated *Mission and Vision Month*. What started out as a simple idea to help us connect to our revised Mission and Vision statements became a viral swell of pride for CHS – over who we are, what we do and where we’re going. The depth of our teammates’ commitment to health, hope and healing – and to being the first and best choice for care – hasn’t slowed. If anything, the more we talk about our mission and vision and incorporate these statements into our daily “why,” the more their commitment multiplies. They feel a personal connection to these words, and because they were involved in the process, they continue to *breathe life* into them every single day.

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