

Building the Ideal Rural Hospital Employee

Through Improv, Psychological
Safety & Collective Intelligence

The Current State



STAFFING SHORTAGES
IMPACTING MAJORITY OF
RURAL HOSPITALS



BURNOUT APPROACHING
50% ACROSS HEALTHCARE
ROLES



TURNOVER DRIVING COST,
FATIGUE, AND INSTABILITY

The Hidden Problem

It's not just staffing—it's alignment

Mismatch between role demands and employee expectations

Rural environments require versatility and resilience

Shift the Model

From hiring →
Designing

From job
descriptions →
Employee avatars

From top-down
→ Co-created
solutions

Why Improv Works



Builds
psychological
safety quickly



Encourages
listening and trust



Strengthens
adaptability under
pressure

Improv Exercise

1

Prompt: Ideal employee is someone who...

2

Only respond with 'Yes, And'

3

Build—don't block ideas

More Than Just Games

Improv warm up games
are designed to create
group mind and to shut
down the prefrontal
cortex



Debrief

Did energy increase?

Did ideas expand?

Did judgment decrease?

Top Rural Competencies



ADAPTABILITY
ACROSS ROLES



AUTONOMY AND
DECISION-MAKING



STRONG
COMMUNICATION



EMOTIONAL
INTELLIGENCE



COMMUNITY
CONNECTION



Burnout Drivers

Emotional exhaustion

Feeling undervalued

Role overload

Lack of support

Create the Avatar



Name, role, background



Strengths and superpowers



Stress triggers



Support needs

Stress Test

Short
staffing

High patient
load

Emotional
situations

How do they
respond?

Resource Mapping

WHO can mentor?

WHAT systems support?

WHERE can we cross-train?

HOW do we reinforce behaviors?

Real-World Impact



Peer mentorship
improves retention



Cross-training
increases flexibility



Small cultural shifts
drive engagement

Psychological Safety

01

Ask for
input

02

Normalize
mistakes

03

Reward
speaking up

04

Model
vulnerability

Micro-Behaviors



Eye contact



Using names



Gratitude



Quick emotional
check-ins

Commitment



Key Takeaways

Co-created
solutions
outperform
directives

Psychological
safety drives
performance

Small changes
create lasting
impact

Final Thought

People don't leave jobs—they
leave environments where they
can't thrive

Thank You

- Questions & Discussion

