

Healing What Ails Healthcare in the United States



I'll start by acknowledging that the U.S. healthcare system is amazing. It has achieved incredible life-enhancing and life-saving advancements. It has been, and continues to be, an incredible strength to the world and has benefited billions of people.

But despite this overall strength, the system has produced:

- Continuing high rates of accidental deaths and injuries
- Physician and nurse burnout and high turnover
- Dissatisfied patients citing a poor healthcare experience
- Rising costs and limited access to care

Many professionals in the U.S. who entered healthcare to help others are discouraged—even despondent—because they feel the current system deprives them of the joy and fulfillment they hoped to achieve through a career of service.

At the same time, other professionals in the same system love their jobs, enjoy their co-workers, find fulfillment in serving their patients, and are satisfied with management, physicians, and regulators.

What makes the difference between the healthcare professional who loves their work and the one who seems stuck in a downward spiral with no way out?

Mindset.

The difference is a change from an inward mindset—where I see others as objects or vehicles to get what I need and want—to an outward mindset, where I see others as people who as matter as much as I matter.

With an outward mindset, I am alive to others. I care about their needs, goals, and objectives. I think about how I can help them achieve those things.

In a healthcare setting, this mindset change might look like:

- A nurse who checks on an alarm for a patient who isn't her responsibility, knowing that team coverage of alarms can help ensure patient safety.
- A physician who recognizes that the nurse who corrected his mistake wasn't trying to challenge his authority.
- A hospital administrator who visits patients and washes her hands before entering any patient room, understanding the importance of personal connections and hygiene to patients and staff.

Having an outward mindset doesn't mean I'm unconcerned with my own goals and needs. It does mean that when others matter, we can more effectively help each other and the organization to be successful. The nurse might inspire confidence in patients and even save a life. The physician's patient might receive better care and a better experience. The hospital administrator might leave a positive impression with patients and inspire staff about the importance of following protocol.

Why is mindset the key to meaningful change?

In healthcare as in many industries, people tend to focus on behavior. To treat illness, for example, healthcare professionals recommend certain treatments—take this medicine, change this habit, go to this specialist. In most cases, the philosophy is, “do X to get Y result.”

This approach can be effective. But there’s something missing.

Research (ours and others’) shows that focusing on behavior change alone won’t drive truly significant change, especially within an organization. A focus on mindset is a critical part of creating change that lasts.

Mindset drives behavior, which drives results.

According to [one study](#), “Organizations that identify and address pervasive mindsets at the outset are four times more likely to succeed in organizational-change efforts than are companies that overlook this stage.” Our experience with clients confirms this assessment; we regularly see mindset change become a foundation for effective behavior change.

How can a focus on an outward mindset heal what is ailing healthcare?

I’m not saying mindset change will cure all the complex challenges and problems that healthcare faces today. I am saying it is a part—a critical part—of the solution. A change in mindset can improve the experience for you, me, and millions of people who receive healthcare in hospitals, clinics, care centers, and homes each day.

Imagine what would happen if everyone in healthcare operated with an outward mindset—if they were committed to the success of everyone around them instead of just themselves. What could result?

- Fewer accidental deaths and injuries
- Less burnout and lower turnover
- Satisfied patients having great experiences
- Lower costs and increased access to care