

July 12, 2008

## Superintendent's Message: Challenging work place culture

If you have ever moved into a new house, office or cubical, you know firsthand the amount of "stuff" a person can accumulate over time. With every move, you might purge a little bit but knowing what to hold and what to let go is not that easy.

We will all be making some big moves during the next several years as the hospitals in Salem and Junction City are constructed. Deciding physically what to keep will be guided heavily by the layout of the new hospital but how do we decide what to bring from the existing culture that has grown around us all these years?

That is the challenge. And it is a challenge from our governor, who recently sat down with OSH staff in the Brooks Conference Room to talk about their issues and concerns. At that meeting Governor Kulongoski challenged OSH staff to change the culture of the hospital.

What is workplace culture and why change it?

Every organization or job environment has a different workplace culture. These are the things that you cannot neatly file away or store in a box. Workplace culture defines how we communicate, influences our attitude and dictates our behavior as we perform thousands of actions and interactions every day.

"But we've always done it that way," is a statement that directly reflects workplace culture. Without intending to, those who support and maintain the current workplace culture may actually be limiting the capabilities of employees to innovate, adjust to changes, and embrace more efficient ways to do business.

In a prior message, I asked for your ideas on how the Oregon State Hospital can provide better care and treatment now and in the future. You may have seen a poster or two around the Salem and Portland campuses carrying the same message. Again, this is a time for creativity and innovation. We don't want a culture that fosters limits on creative thinking and problem-solving;

we are not going to solve problems using the same kind of thinking that caused the problems in first place.

Changing workplace culture takes time and there are no hard and fast rules to follow. We do, however, have what are known as “cultural artifacts” to help guide us in this process. These are the characteristics that support and reflect an organization’s workplace culture. Let’s grow a new culture that is strongly rooted in our core values of integrity, stewardship, responsibility, respect and professionalism.