

SHSMD26 CONNECTIONS

Health Care Marketing, Strategy & Communications

American Hospital Association Conference
September 27-29 ⚓ Baltimore

COREWELL HEALTH'S "OUR COMMITMENT" ROLLOUT LESSONS

A Hands-on Workshop for Aligning Strategy, Brand & Culture

- **Holly Sullivan**, SVP, Brand Marketing, Communications and Consumer Experience, Corewell Health
- **Jeff Gourdji**, Senior Partner, Health Care Practice, Prophet



Learning Objectives & Agenda

DIMENSION-ALIZING THE PROBLEM

Audit, prioritize, and **simplify competing strategic elements**, determining what to retire or consolidate to improve clarity and adoption.

FRAMING & DEVELOPING THE SOLUTION

Define a **purpose-led “throughline”** that connects the organization’s external and internal brand; and identify where misalignment is undermining trust.

ACTIVATING THE SOLUTION

Learn how to **embed the purpose along the employee journey at all levels** to build ambassadorship as they, in turn, activate purpose along the consumer journey.

First, let's get to know one another

Take a few minutes to get to know those at your table...

1. What is your biggest challenge in aligning your brand and culture strategy?
2. Where is your organization today?
 - No formal efforts connecting brand and culture
 - Early planning in efforts to better connect brand and culture
 - Active programs connecting brand and culture
 - Mature strategy connecting brand and culture
3. What are you looking for from today's session?

MODULE ONE

Dimension-alizing the Problem

Health systems are making bigger bets with thinner margins

The strategic bar is rising: major investments now must create measurable value faster, with less room for error

Adjusted hospital
operating margin for 2025
was only

1.3%

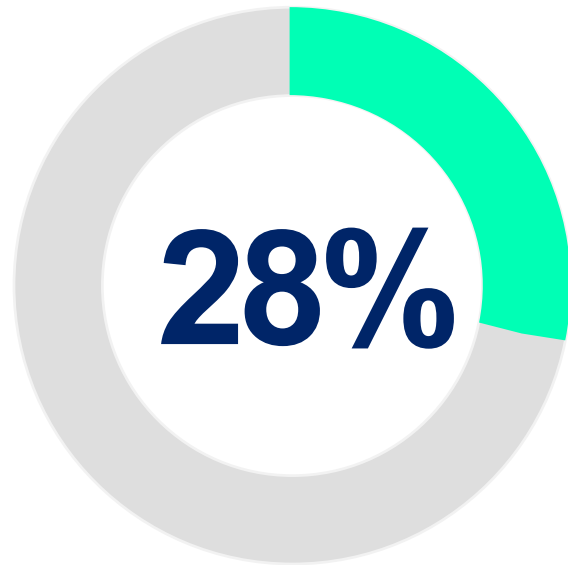
Source: Kaufman Hall / Vizient National Hospital
Flash Report, 2025 data



Yet systems still need to fund the next operating model

- **AI & automation**
Clinical, admin and decision support
- **Digital infrastructure**
Data platforms, interoperability and cybersecurity
- **Ambulatory expansion**
Shift care to lower-cost, higher-access settings
- **Workforce models**
New staffing, productivity and retention approaches
- **Partnerships**
Payers, tech, retail, community and specialty players

Only 28% of leaders responsible for execution can identify their organization's top priorities



While strategy formulation has become sophisticated—strategy *communication* and *activation* have not kept pace.

The result? Leaders believe the strategy is clear, but the people executing it are operating on instinct, habit, or competing local priorities.

Source: MIT Sloan analysis of 124 organizations.

Marketing, in collaboration with other functions, can be a critical engine of health system competitiveness

“

Successful organizations ensure the company's internal culture and external brand are not just aligned, but serve as reflections of each other to minimize any cognitive dissonance—among stakeholders inside and out.”

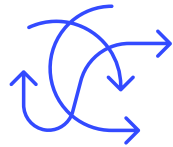
- Forbes, “Your Employer Brand Is Your Brand: The Power Of The CPO And CMO Relationship” by Cara Brennan Allamano

There are three common challenges that health systems face today when activating a strategy



THE DELIVERY GAP

Brands often overpromise and underdeliver



THE CLARITY GAP

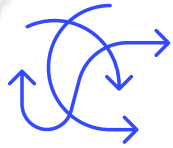
Employees struggle to remember all of the strategic frameworks



THE TRANSLATION GAP

Strategy that hasn't been translated to action dies on the shelf

Too many pillars and too many priorities lead to too little stickiness



THE CLARITY GAP

Employees struggle to remember all of the strategic frameworks





In February 2022, Corewell Health was formed from the merger of Beaumont and Spectrum Health

The merger promised greater access, affordability, and care quality across Michigan.

However, there were several challenges we encountered in bringing clarity to the team



Unclear Company Direction

“Why did we merge in the first place?”



Change Fatigue

“Leaders need to understand our region’s size and complexity—not everything is transferable.”



Loss of Identity

“What is the value to me to be part of Corewell Health?”



“Us” vs. “Them”

“I wonder if there is a place for me at Corewell Health. Why did ‘we’ need to merge with ‘them’?”



Lack of Psychological Safety

“I’m pulling away because I feel like I don’t have a voice. It isn’t worth the effort because I don’t feel like it matters.”

Although our brand and our culture were intended to be linked, they lived separately

Brand Promise



Employee Value Proposition



MODULE TWO

Framing & Developing a Solution

High-performing organizations integrate strategy, brand and culture, connected by a clear, simply articulated purpose



An out-of-category example:



EXERCISE ONE | PART ONE

Inventorying strategic artifacts

Organizations often define strategy, brand, and culture through a collection of often overlapping strategic artifacts.

Consider your organization. Take a moment to jot down the strategic elements your organization may have rolled out.

A few thought starters:

STRATEGY

- Business strategy
- Strategic imperatives
- Ambition
- Vision
- Mission
- Value proposition

BRAND

- Brand strategy
- Positioning strategy
- Brand essence
- Brand personality
- Brand voice
- Brand manifesto

CULTURE

- Employee value prop.
- Values
- Mindsets
- Behaviors
- Service standards
- People credo

EXERCISE ONE | PART TWO

Prioritizing strategic artifacts

Together, all of these elements create a few challenges:

- There's too much for people to remember
- Team members don't know how to prioritize or what to focus on
- It's too much to maintain

It's less important which elements are included in each cornerstone, and more important which questions they answer.

1. What are our strategic investment priorities?
2. What value do we create for customers?
3. How do employees work with each other to achieve the direction?

If the real challenge is answering these questions, which element(s) are most critical for team members to focus on?

When brand and culture are closely integrated, they lift each other up and make each other stronger

How can the brand attract top talent?

I want to be part of a company that is delivering that kind of value to its customers.

How can the brand inspire employees and drive a culture of care?

I want to be the reason customers choose us again and again.



How can the culture expand brand delivery capabilities?

I am always learning new skills and behaviors, from the company and from my colleagues.

How can the culture incentivize better brand delivery?

I am recognized and rewarded when I deliver on the brand, and the business holds me accountable for it.

Bringing Brand and Culture together at Corewell Health

The background of the slide features a dark blue gradient. Overlaid on this gradient are several concentric white arcs that originate from the right side and curve towards the left, creating a sense of depth and movement.

Our brand and our culture serve as two sides of the same coin; different, but linked and dependent



Align & Simplify

- Brand = External Reputation
- Culture = Internal Reputation
- Back of house/Front of house

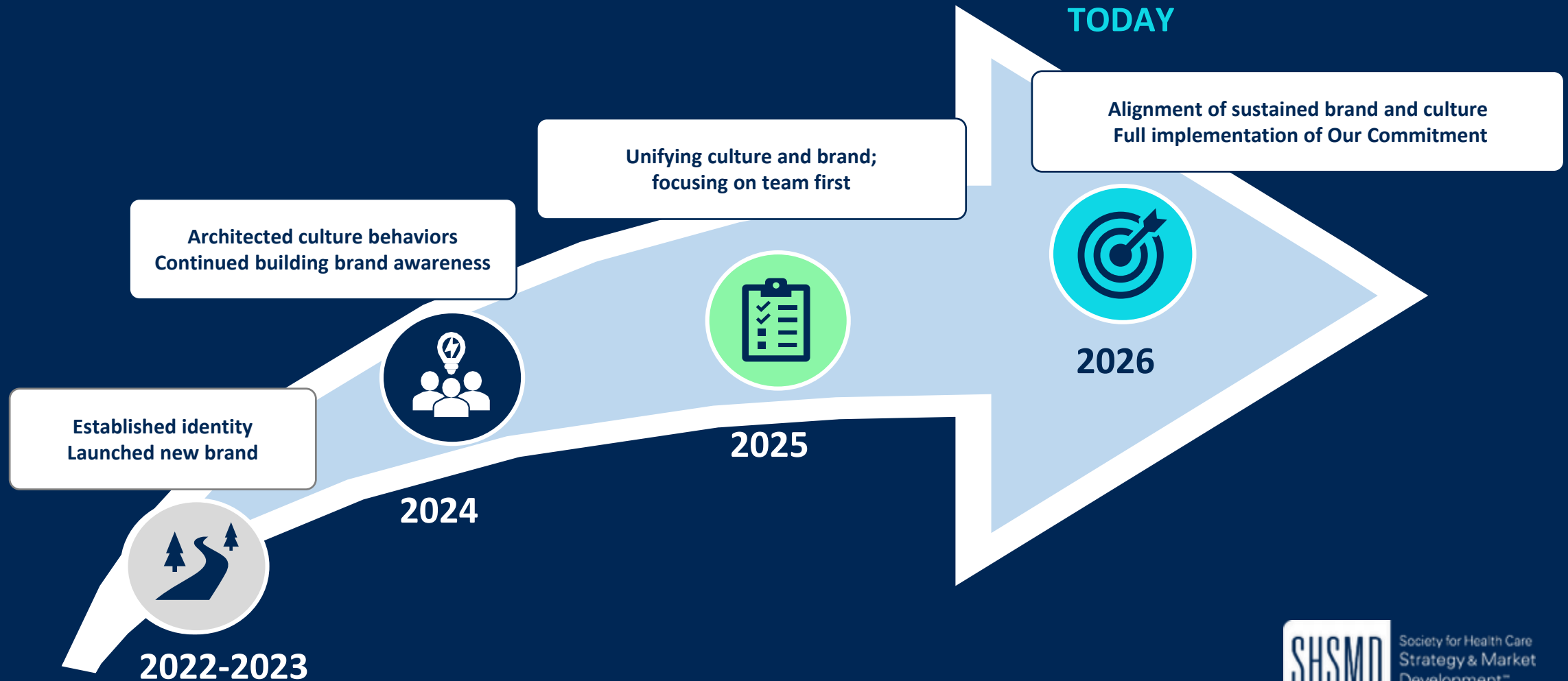


We crafted a single articulation to translate them into a unified purpose: Our Commitment



“Better”

The initial journey of brand and culture



INTERACTIVE EXERCISE

Bringing brand & culture together

5 minutes

Take a moment to jot down how brand and culture might go together at your organization. Then, draft a potential articulation that combines both the culture commitment and brand promise into a single statement.

10 minutes

As a table, select two people at the table who easily filled out the exercise to share and discuss their unlocks.

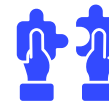
5 minutes

After the discussion, take a quick break before we discuss together!

Illustrative Criteria



Is simple and easy to remember



Aligns with the organization's strategy



Is actionable



Is accessible & relatable



Informs what we do (and don't do)



Motivates employees

INTERACTIVE EXERCISE

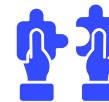
Bringing brand & culture together

For those who struggled,
what were the challenges
you encountered?

Illustrative Criteria



**Is simple and easy to
remember**



**Aligns with the
organization's strategy**



Is actionable



**Is accessible &
relatable**



**Informs what we do
(and don't do)**



Motivates employees

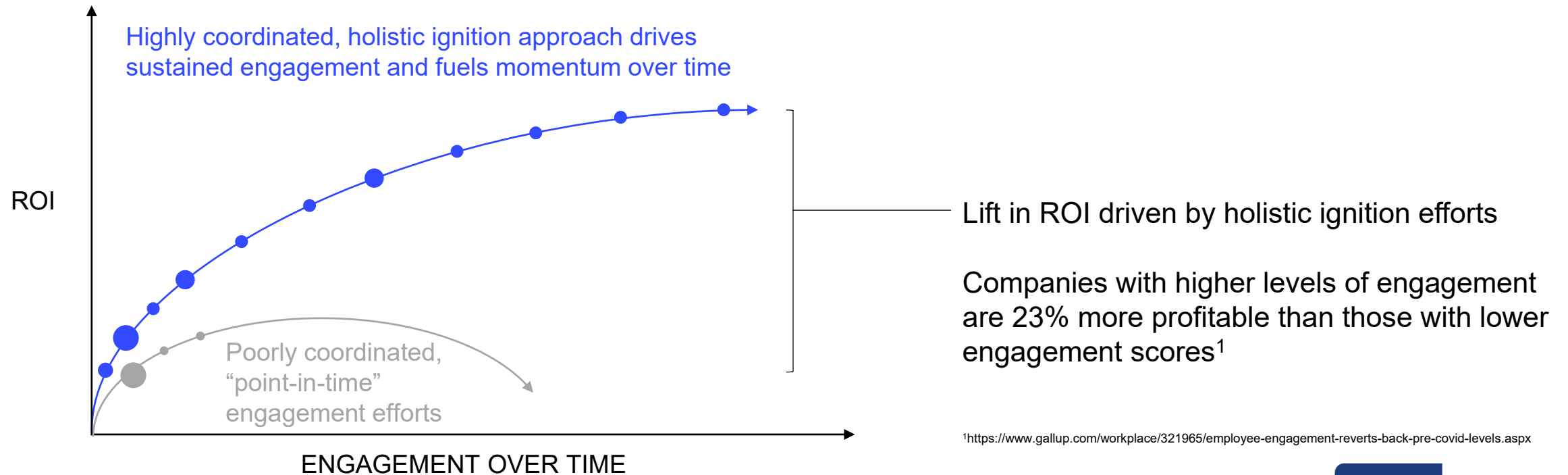


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MODULE THREE

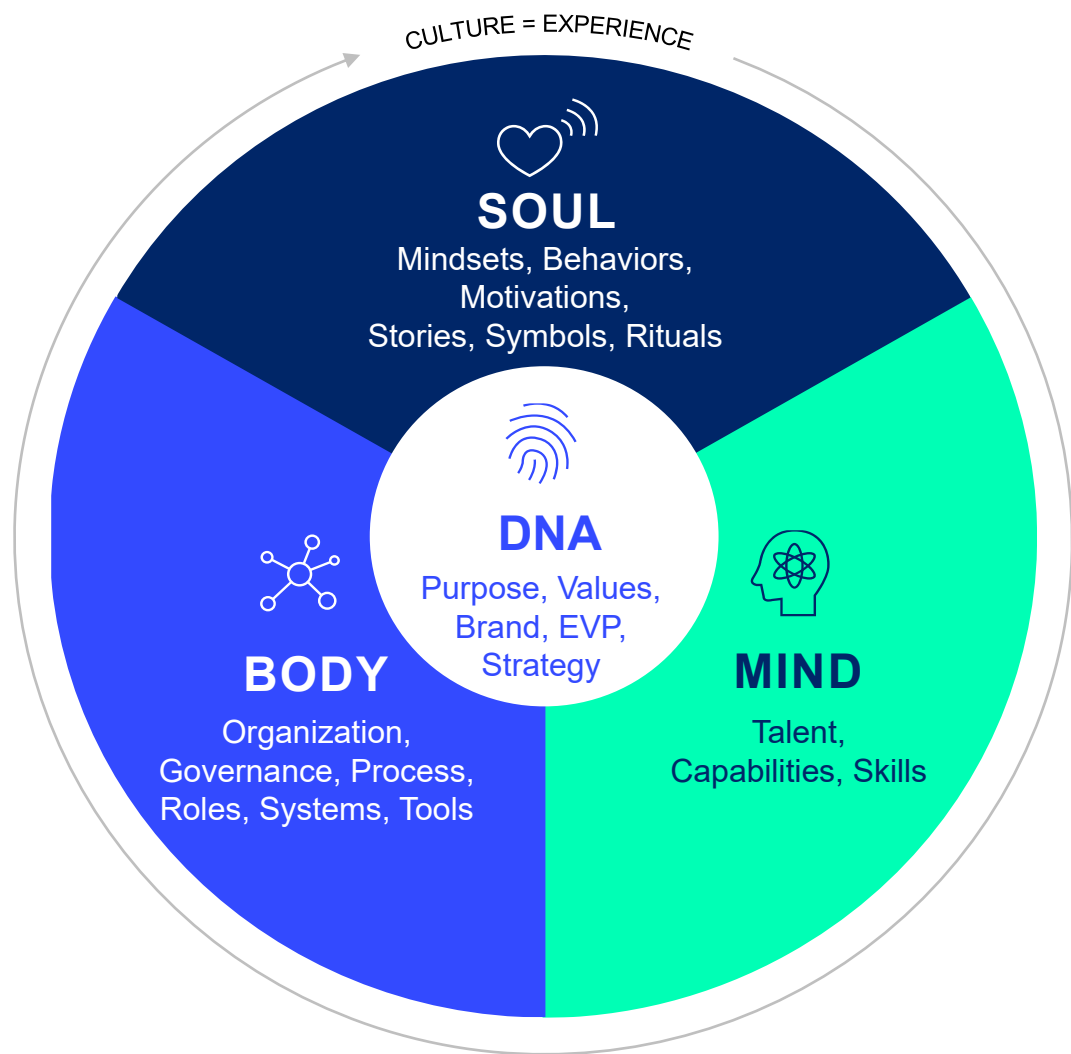
Activating a Solution

When done well, a holistic approach to igniting employees around a shared aspiration can unlock untapped value and drive uncommon growth



¹<https://www.gallup.com/workplace/321965/employee-engagement-reverts-back-pre-covid-levels.aspx>

This requires a systems view—coordinating across the organization’s mind, body, and soul



Prophet's Human-Centered Transformation Model



DNA – Define

What is our destination
and direction of travel?



SOUL – Motivate

How might we ignite belief
in the change needed?



MIND – Enable

What new skills are required
to drive the change?



BODY – Direct

What might need to change
in our operating model?

Corewell Health and Prophet partnered to embed Our Commitment across the organization



DNA – Define

- Brand, team member value proposition → Our Commitment
- Connecting it to other strategies like the People Strategy



SOUL – Motivate

- Designing inaugural leadership summits to unite leaders
- Celebrating stories of how Our Commitment shows up
- Emphasizing new rituals like “Our Commitment Moments”



MIND – Enable

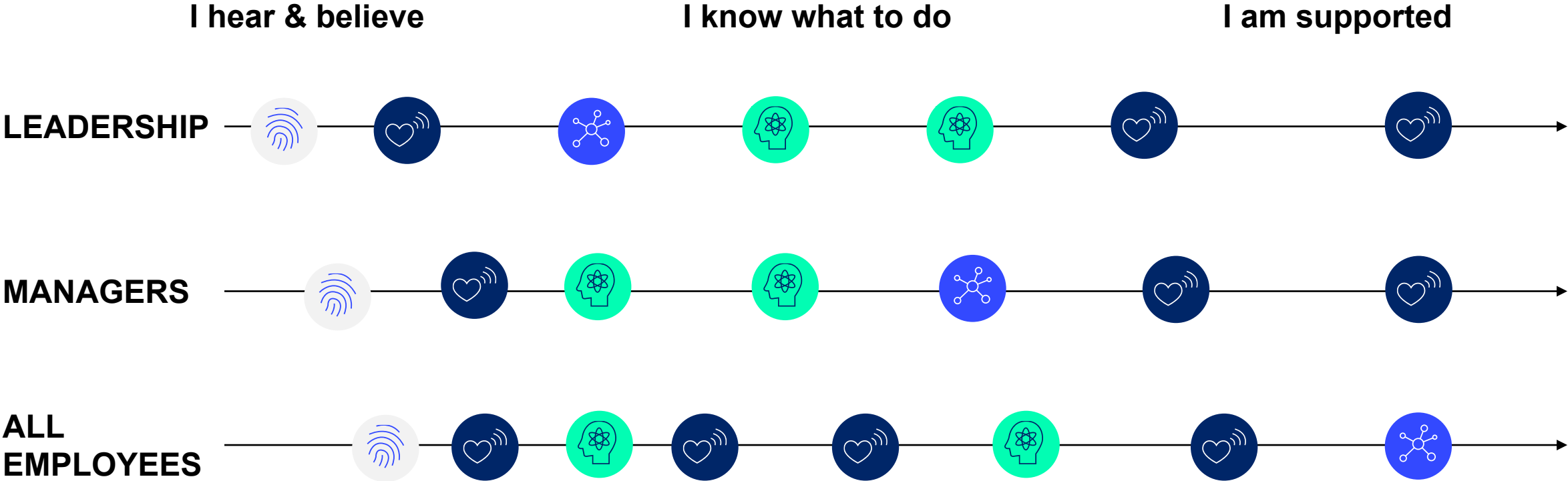
- Upskilling leaders through the leadership summits
- Integrating Our Commitment with onboarding, L&D programs, values-in-action competencies



BODY – Direct

- Connecting leaders and breaking down silos
- Integrating Our Commitment into systems and processes

A drumbeat of engagement builds ownership among leaders and embeds purpose across the organization



Activating Our Commitment



Brand makes the promise.
Culture lives by that promise.
Experience keeps & delivers on our promise

Bringing Our Commitment to life will be an ongoing journey



2025

Our teams know what Our Commitment is



2026

We bring Our Commitment to life, starting with team members first



2027

We bring Our Commitment to life everywhere for every person, every time



2028+

Our Commitment differentiates us as a brand and employer

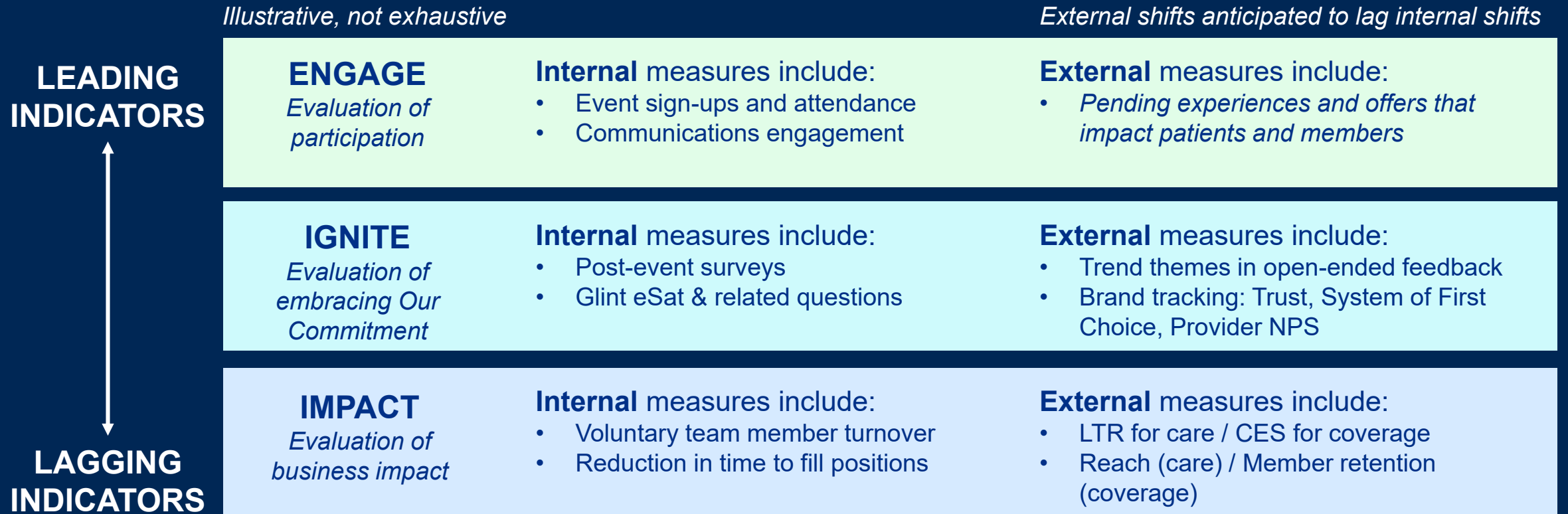
Accelerate



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We've built a measurement framework to track our progress over time

Next Step: set targets in partnership with HR, Brand, Communications, CX, and PX







INTERACTIVE EXERCISE

Ideating an employee ignition program

Consider how you might strategically engage employees around your organization’s purpose or aspiration.

Step 1: As a table, identify one audience segment **WHO** is important for all of your organizations in order to make the purpose stick.

Step 2: Discuss **WHAT** you specifically need this audience to do or believe for purpose to take root.

Step 3: Brainstorm **HOW** we can effectively drive this objective with our audience.

Some thought-starters

Executive leadership	Managers and directors	Clinical / frontline employees	...
Instill ownership and confidence to evangelize the purpose internally	Drive clarity and understanding so they see themselves as purpose ambassadors	Build connection so they feel their work matters and aligns with purpose	...
• Measurement and feedback loops • ...	• Peer-to-peer ambassador programs • ...	• Storytelling sessions or purpose talks • ...	...

Additional example tactics

I hear & believe



Lunch and Learn

Informal Q&A sessions with employees over lunch or snacks to address initial questions about the new strategy and rollout



FAQ Cheat Sheet

An FAQ document providing a quick-reference for employees (e.g., reasons for the strategy, what it means for employees, etc.)



Introductory Video

A short video to introduce the new strategy, utilizing imagery and footage to showcase the themes, with an introduction from senior leadership



Microsite

A microsite dedicated to the new strategy – providing tools, content and a place for employees to engage with the strategy

I know what to do



Employee Stories

A series of videos showcasing stories from employees that demonstrate the new strategy



Mentoring Program

A company-sponsored mentoring program that pairs employees of different tenures and/or backgrounds together; Features tailored content and resources that align with the objectives of the strategy



Manager's Guide

A detailed document that outlines the strategy, materials to share with employees after the launch, and how to manage reactions and serve as a change agent



Blog / Podcast

Blog posts to share updates and stories on how the strategy launch is going and address questions to keep the conversation going internally

I am supported



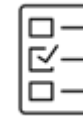
Employee & Customer Appreciation Cards

A set of business-sized cards given in recognition of exceptional work on behalf of customers and fellow employees



Recognition Program

A recognition program that directly rewards behaviors observed in relation to the strategy



Employee Onboarding

A strategy-driven onboarding experience that inspires employees through content that shows how we work, using stories from frontline employees to bring it to life



A Day in the Life Work Session

Interactive work-session to teach employees how to bring the strategy to life through everyday business activities

Our



Commitment

what our team members are telling us...

"There's clear emphasis that we are one Corewell Health, and the role leaders play in bringing our commitment to life through our teams."

"Consistent messaging around the commitment is very helpful. Committing to the commitment reassures that this isn't a 'flavor of the week' strategy."

"I think the simplicity of our commitment is the most impactful piece. Quick, consistent, to the point. It's smart."

"We need continued conversation on putting our commitment into practice for our frontline team members as we progress in our journey. They are a key piece to this puzzle."

"This new Commitment includes me!"

"Our Commitment helped me feel like we are truly unified as a single Corewell entity instead of regions or departments. It left me inspired to push this messaging even more to my teams."

"I don't necessarily need more tools, but we all need to walk the talk to keep the momentum going."

"I would like to see evidence of our leaders living our commitment in their actions."

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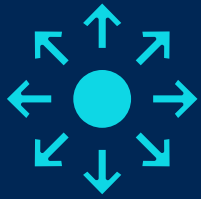
We're already seeing early results from activating across our 65,000 team members

92% of leaders excited to bring
Our Commitment to life

+11% increase in leadership
understanding of company
direction

+4% increase in likelihood to
recommend Corewell as a
great place to work

Success factors and parting advice



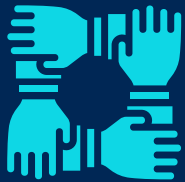
Launch the
inside out



Engage key
stakeholders



Gain leadership
buy-in



Co-create throughout
the organization



Think of it as a journey,
not a “launch”



Simplify &
Reinforce

Three key take-aways

Think of the exercises we completed today as guiding milestones for how you can move forward:

Simplify competing strategic elements to improve clarity and adoption



Define a purpose-led “throughline” that connects the organization’s external brand promise and internal brand promise



Design cross-level activation plans—with engaging, impactful experiences along the employee journey

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Questions?

- Please be sure to complete the session evaluation on the mobile app!



Holly Sullivan

**Senior Vice President, Brand
Marketing, Communications and
Consumer Experience**



Holly is the Senior Vice President, Brand Marketing, Communications and Consumer Experience at Corewell Health, a longtime SHSMD Board Member, and the former President of SHSMD.

She leads brand management, performance marketing, digital engagement, and consumer experience across regions, aligning brand and experience to inspire trust and loyalty. She sets the vision to bring the brand promise to life at every touchpoint—physical and digital—for consumers, patients, families, team members, and communities.

With 25+ years in strategy, business development and marketing, she previously led national healthcare business development and marketing for a leading consulting firm and has international finance experience.





Jeff Gourdji

Senior Partner,
Health Care Practice

PROPHET

Jeff is a senior partner with over twenty years of experience leading high-impact marketing, strategy, and culture projects. While he specializes in health care—payers, providers, pharma, service, and healthcare technology organizations—he brings experience from food, agriculture, pet care, education, energy, and industrial sectors.

Prior to joining Prophet in 2008, he held roles at The Zyman Group and Kraft Foods and worked as a political and legislative strategist. He leads Prophet's health care practice and authored the book *Making the Healthcare Shift: The Transformation to Consumer-Centricity* (2019).

Jeff has a B.A. from the University of Michigan and an M.B.A. from the University of Chicago. Jeff lives in Chicago with his wife and three sons.

Resources

- [“Your Employer Brand Is Your Brand: The Power Of The CPO And CMO Relationship”](#), Forbes
- Prophet’s [Human-Centered Transformation Model](#)
- [“Brand and Culture: At the Intersection of Uncommon Growth”](#), Prophet
- [“Catalysts: Transform Purpose from Catchy Slogan to Growth Engine”](#), Prophet