Massachusetts
The Power of Positive Deviance

Solutions before our very eyes

- In every community or organization there are certain individuals or groups whose uncommon practices/behaviors enable them to find better solutions to problems than their neighbors or colleagues who have access to the same resources.
Positive Deviance (PD) Approach

- Engages the very people “whose behavior needs to change to solve the problem” to identify existing solutions from within

- Thereby suppressing the “immune rejection response”
PD Focus on **Practice** Rather than Knowledge

- “It’s easier to **ACT** your way into a new way of **THINKING**, than to **THINK** your way into a new way of **ACTING**”
PD’s Six Key Questions

PD is driven by a particular set of questions:

– What would you like to know about this problem?
– What do you do about this problem?
– What are the barriers that prevent you from doing it 100% of the time?
– Who do you know who is doing the right thing or who has overcome these barriers? (the positive deviants)
– Who else needs to be in this conversation that isn’t here? (i.e. “Don’t decide about me without me”)
– How do we invite those people to be part of the action?
– What other ideas do you have?
Analyzing PD Findings

*PD findings are passed through a lens of “accessibility”*

- Only those behaviors/strategies accessible to all within a cohort or unit are kept

- The rest are “**TBU,**” True but Useless (i.e. not accessible to all) and are discarded
When to use the PD approach

☑️ The problem requires behavioral and/or social change.
☑️ It is a seemingly “intractable” problem.
☑️ The problem is important and compelling.
☑️ The problem is concrete and specific.
☑️ Solutions must be possible; usually Positive Deviants already exist.
☑️ Both the problem and anticipated progress are measurable.
☑️ Leadership is committed to addressing the issue and willing to act when necessary to address identified barriers and possible solutions.
Using PD, we address discrete parts of complex problems (... fractals of the whole)

... new behaviors amplify across the system and we ultimately impact significant underlying structural issues.

Small Actions = Big Impact
How is PD Different?

- Flows from identification and analysis of solutions NOT problems
- Solutions are appropriate because they emerge from the system
- Creates “ownership,” NOT “buy-in”
- Appreciative, strength-based – focuses on what’s working
- Emphasis is on changing behavior not increasing knowledge
- Includes unusual suspects
- It works!