

Tierra del Sol

Evolving principles into practice.

Tierra del Sol is a non-profit organization in Sunland, California committed to creating a strong and vibrant community in which all of its members contribute their strengths and assets to the common good. Tierra’s mission is to empower people with disabilities to fulfill their potential and desire to become productive citizens who are accepted, included, and valued for the contributions they make to the economic, civic, and cultural vitality of their community. Their team of 300 compassionate employees are actively working toward the day when people with any type of disability are fully recognized as an integral part of the community — as neighbors, coworkers, and contributors.

THE PROBLEM

Quantifying engagement through rapid growth

Tierra del Sol’s leadership knew intuitively that engagement was already high at their mission-driven company. Employees were genuinely committed to their work, and aligned with the organization’s purpose. Yet their challenge was twofold: first, they wanted a tool to generate reliable engagement data that would let them quantify what they intuited; second, they didn’t want to get complacent — especially knowing that rising turnover, rapid growth, and decentralized teams presented challenges for the future. The rapid growth of geographically widespread teams made quick line of sight and open communication critical in supporting retention at all levels, including mid-level managers.

During this period of deep transformation, the leadership at Tierra del Sol wanted to ensure that they had a way to systematically apply its foundational principles — “all people have gifts, and our community is richer when all our citizens are valued for their contributions” — across its entire organization, staff and client alike. Simply put, they wanted to embrace an approach that applied the same principles to their own employees, by helping them identify and leverage their own unique strengths, as a building block to drive engagement even higher.



1971
Founded in
Sunland, CA



150
Students at 4
Local Colleges



111
Members in
full work at 31
businesses



300
Full-Time
Employees



483
Volunteers
contributing >
150,000 hours
annually



80
Artists
exhibiting at
>35 shows

THE SOLUTION

Identifying strengths and prioritizing work to increase engagement and performance

To create an effective framework that teams and their leaders could use to recognize individuals' unique contributions and transform their interactions, Tierra del Sol committed to building a culture of strengths-based coaching conversations by implementing StandOut in October of 2017.

On an initial survey in November 2017, StandOut's Engagement Pulse established a baseline by measuring the eight factors that decades of research have revealed as the keys to engagement. The tool confirmed what leadership suspected. As a team of people who love what they do and who they serve, the employees of Tierra del Sol were naturally highly engaged, with 31.4% of their workforce Fully Engaged (i.e., giving the highest scores on almost all survey items) — much higher than the 18.7% US national benchmark.

However, the question remained: could that number go even higher?

Beyond simply measuring engagement, StandOut provided Tierra del Sol with tools and strategies to meet this challenge to increase engagement. Two tools were key to success. The first was the StandOut strengths assessment, which provided language and concepts to help team members understand each other's strengths. StandOut's implementation team offered top-level executives support with presentations, videos, and collateral to launch the entire StandOut platform successfully within the organization. The second was the Check-In tool. Tierra del Sol devoted a substantial part of its implementation time to developing a sharp understanding of how weekly Check-Ins impacted engagement. These simple weekly 1:1 conversations helped both staff and their team leaders focus on each person's strengths in order to address immediate priorities. As the results show, Check-Ins contributed to making an engaged culture even more engaged in their work.

THE RESULTS

Overall, StandOut not only highlighted the strengths of an entire organization for the first time, but also provided a great way for new managers to hit the ground running with better insight into what their people need every day to be successful and fully engaged. The proof of this work is in the numbers. Tierra del Sol has launched two more Engagement Pulses after the initial baseline, seeing their results increase to 34% and most recently 42%. Sometimes, numbers do speak louder than words!

- 94% active adoption rate of StandOut
- 83% of the workforce is checking in biweekly or more often
- Eight months after StandOut launch, Percent Fully Engaged rose by 37% (to 42% Fully Engaged)

“For the first time in our history, front line managers have direct daily access to the unique strengths of each of their team members, which gives them immediate opportunities to increase job performance and engagement, ultimately impacting all departments. It is a game changer.”

Rebecca Lienhard
CEO