



CEO Chen:  
Love is all  
you need  
CHENMED

## How ChenMed Takes ‘Love’ and Turns It Into Profits

BY LOUIS CARTER | JUNE 9, 2022

This fall, *Newsweek*, in collaboration with my company, the Best Practice Institute (BPI), will unveil the second annual Most Loved Workplaces list. The concept is simple: we feature the top 100 companies where employees feel cared for and respected—and have numerous opportunities for advancement.

But before the new list appears, we’ll turn the spotlight on a few of the companies in the inaugural rankings. We started off with Pamela Maynard, CEO of Seattle consulting firm, Avanade, which was Number 31 on last year’s list. (Read it here.)

Now we turn our attention to Chris Chen, CEO of Miami-based ChenMed. The company, Number 36 on the 2021 rankings, operates a 3500-employee chain of some 100 medical clinics that cater to Medicare recipients, many of whom are low income.

ChenMed is interesting in many ways. For one thing, they are focused on what Chen calls, unabashedly, “love” for his employees. But Chen also puts a little twist on this. He finds that showing similar care for its customers can produce tangible results.

“You know, people think love is kooky,” Chen says. “It’s not, it’s highly practical.” Partly as a result of such policies, ChenMed has, he said, managed to reduce ER visits by 30 percent and hospitalization rates by nearly 50 percent. “These are,” he says, “really practical outputs of creating...a culture of love” for both employees and patients.

Here are a few ways Chris, and his company, pull that off.

### **Take Good Care of Your Employees**

“What we tell people is, it’s important to love our patients, but first

learn to love each other, bond together, build relationships with each other,” Chen explained to me. “We must take care of each other first because only people who are loved, can love other people.”

For example: ChenMed started the *ChenMed Cares Foundation*, which donated over \$200,000 in 2021 to more than 150 team members in crisis as a result of the pandemic. The company also launched *ChenMed Cares Christmas Wish*. Staff members could nominate fellow colleagues in need, and as a result, they distributed over \$130,000 to dozens of team members who were struggling during the holiday season.

During Hurricane Ida last year, ChenMed stepped in to help its employees. “The home office,” said Chen, “got in trucks and started bringing generators and drove them from South Florida all the way to New Orleans. We were even able to distribute and serve 750 hot meals and provide essentials...to our people.”

### **Build Their Careers**

ChenMed also helps employees in other, more career-oriented ways. *ChenMedU*, for instance, is designed to provide workers with the continued learning and professional development they need to be successful in their roles at the company—and transform their careers.

Programs include a 9-month physician training course and a 6-month leadership training program focused

on love, accountability and passion available to all ChenMed employees. ChenMedU is designed to help leaders and their teams master the ChenMed model of care, choose a path and build their careers.

Employee shout-outs are important as well: an online recognition platform empowers peers and leaders to recognize team members for living out the company’s values. Employees earn points through these recognitions that can lead to prizes as well as virtual badges and certificates of appreciation.

### **Love the People You Serve**

Chen said that forming bonds with patients also helps when it comes to successfully treating them. He told me a story of a severely overweight patient whose bad eating habits—fried chicken for dinner every night, in this case—led to heart failure. Chen knew he couldn’t walk into the exam room and simply say, stop. So, he decided to get to know her better. He asked about her life and they shared photos of their children. They soon bonded and the patient left behind her daily fried chicken habit, lost 150 pounds and almost entirely eradicated her heart disease. “She trusted me,” Chen said.

He added: “We have to teach our doctors how to practice preventative care and build relationships with patients to prevent bad things from happening.” This leads to success in reducing ER visits, developing sol-

id long-term and short-term care programs for patients—all without physician burnout, too.

Does it really work? According to internal surveys, more than 90 percent of ChenMed patients say they genuinely feel cared for by their doctors and staff.

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Now, this isn’t all to say that ChenMed employees weren’t skeptical about this love thing.

When Chen’s executive team first reviewed the idea of making love their top core value, they cautiously approached him. “Hey, Chris, we love the value systems,” they said. “And we love what we’re trying to do here. We love the mission, how we’re trying to transform care and do it in the neediest populations. But this value of love, it just sounds so kooky. And it’s really not corporate. And we’re growing so fast and we’re going to be a big corporation really soon. Can we consider something besides love?”

Chen thanked them for speaking up, but held his ground. “Folks go to work for 8+ hours a day. And they aren’t receiving or expected to give love. But why do we exist? When you decide to bring love into the workplace... everything falls in place. Everything.”

*Louis Carter is founder and CEO of the Best Practice Institute, Most Loved Workplace and author of more than 10 leadership/management books including In Great Company (McGraw Hill, 2019). See Lou’s interview with Chen here.*