

ORGANIZATIONAL DYNAMICS

Encouraging Work/Life Balance

Healthcare employers often say that their greatest assets are their employees—people who must juggle their work responsibilities and life obligations. Employers of choice understand that work/life balance has a strong impact on job performance, recruitment, and retention. These employers continually evaluate employees' stressors and strategically respond with policies, programs, services, and attitudes that foster well-being through the effective management of job duties and personal commitments. To encourage work/life balance in your organization, use the following strategies:

- **Complete an audit of programs and services in place at your organization that support work/life balance.** This inventory will reinforce what you are doing right and will also reveal potential areas of weakness or gaps in services. A variety of tools exist to help you.

The National Work/Life Initiative has created Categories of Work-Life Effectiveness, a basic tool that guides you through the audit process. To download the document, go to www.awlp.com/nwli/homepage.jsp. A more detailed assessment tool is available from the Boston College Center for Work & Family. The Excellence Index is useful for organizations just getting started and those that want to assess work/life efforts over time or across departments. To access this index, go to www.bc.edu/cwf and follow the "Standards of Excellence" link.

- **Identify workplace problems that occur when employees have trouble balancing work duties and personal demands.** Supervisors are most likely to "feel the pain," so be sure to ask for their input in addition to surveying your employees. You can also review company data—including turnover and absenteeism rates, recruitment costs, cost of unfilled positions, and productivity indicators—to explore the type and source of



problems. Once you've identified specific needs and areas of weakness, rate the "pain" in your organization by answering the following questions: Is the problem localized, widespread, acute, chronic, or a combination of multiple types? Which employee groups are affected? (For example, is it difficult to retain IT professionals or easy to find clerical support?) How is the quality or performance of work affected? (For instance, do preoccupied unit clerks negatively influence the efficiency of doctors and nurses?)

- **Prepare to implement solutions.** To address the work/life problems in your workplace most effectively, make sure you set the stage for success. First, pay attention to your organization's culture. Are there written, or unwritten, policies that stall creativity and block attempts to introduce workplace flexibility? Second, set priorities and analyze the benefits and costs of possible solutions. Consider both the results of your work/life audit and the workplace problems you uncovered. Use that information to craft reasonable solutions and effect sustainable change. Third, incorporate work/life efforts into quality improvement and employee benefits programs. This step will ensure that work/life efforts remain a strategic, vital part of your organization.

Source: Christina Beach Thielst, CHE, health administration and work/life balance consultant, Santa Barbara, CA; (805) 967-5032; gthielst@aol.com.

The Truth about Creating a Coaching Culture

Do you want to support managers and staff in discovering and maximizing their professional and personal potential? Create a coaching culture! As a first step, consider these realities:

- **Creating a coaching culture involves action, not just words.** Simply adding a statement about coaching to your list of organizational values will not do much to foster a culture that truly embraces coaching. Instead, as a leader, you must model coaching behaviors and support your staff in implementing the concepts and actions of coaching. In addition, your organization should develop descriptions of coaching competencies that are then evaluated in each employee's performance review. This strategy will ensure that everyone is held accountable for demonstrating a commitment to, and proficiency in, coaching.
- **Creating a coaching culture is an ongoing process, not a onetime accomplishment.** As a leader, you have the privilege of being able to initiate a coaching culture by demonstrating the appropriate behaviors and creating awareness of the importance of coaching. You also have the ability to devote organizational resources to supporting coaching through training sessions and educational materials. Once your managers and employees learn and adopt basic coaching behaviors, your organization will form a foundation for future coaching concepts, which in turn will lead to enhanced accountability and communication that promote more coaching.

Source: Debbie Frame, founding partner, The Coaching Group, St. Simons Island, GA; (800) 698-2938; www.thecoachinggroup.com.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Five Questions to Ask New Hires

You've spent months remedying a major staff shortage. After reviewing countless applications, conducting interviews, assessing performance skills, and completing all the other necessary processes, you've finally hired the "cream of the crop" for your department. But it's too soon to breathe a sigh of relief. Attracting the best and the brightest is only part of the equation. Now that you have them, what can you do to keep them? According to healthcare management educator and leadership coach Quint Studer, you must find out what is really on the minds of new employees during their first three months. At one-on-one meetings with your new hires, ask the following questions to secure long-term relationships and gain insight into your organization:

1. How do we compare with what we said we would be like? When expectations aren't being met, new hires may feel as though you have misrepresented the situation. They may even feel lied to. This question will open a dialogue for clarifying new employees' expectations and will give you a good perspective on whether you are delivering what you promised.

2. What is going well? Healthcare workers are often trained to focus on what is going wrong. By asking what is going well, you give new hires a chance to concentrate on the positive aspects of the job. As a bonus, you will find out what truly matters to people.

3. Which employees have been helpful to you? By asking this question, you can discover which employees are valuable in the retention process and then recognize and reward them for helping new hires learn the ropes. Once other



staff see that these employees are being rewarded, they too will become involved in the orientation/training process. Employee turnover affects everyone, and everyone should have a stake in tackling the problem.

4. Are there things you did at your previous workplace that might be helpful to us? This question is a great way to harvest intellectual capital. Current employees may not be good at taking input from new employees, even if the advice is sound. Plus, new hires may be reluctant to offer input for fear of alienating co-workers. This question allows you to create a win-win situation. You get great new ideas for process improvements, and new employees feel as though they have made a valuable contribution.

5. Do you know anyone who might be a valuable addition to our team? At this point, your new employees are likely still in touch with former co-workers. If they are having a good experience with your organization, encourage them to let former co-workers know. This question can spark effective recruiting efforts.

Source: Quint Studer, *Hardwiring Excellence: Purpose, Worthwhile Work, Making a Difference*, Fire Starter Publishing, 2004.

"By asking for the impossible we obtain the best possible."

—Giovanni Niccolini

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Have you implemented workplace strategies that could help your colleagues succeed as well? *Healthcare Executive* invites you to share the workplace knowledge that has played a role in your career success.

To submit an item for consideration, please send it via e-mail to the "Professional Pointers" editor at bduvel@ache.org. You may also fax it to (312) 424-9390. We will review your proposal carefully and contact you promptly.

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