

Employee Management: The Five-Step Management System

Why is managing employees so frustrating? Part of the reason is that every human is a complex, independent, unpredictable organism that rarely does exactly what we want.

BY DEREK A. PREECE, M.B.A.

“If I didn’t have to spend so much time babysitting my employees, maybe I could get some work done.”

Sound familiar? We probably all have experienced some days where we would say the same thing. Why is managing employees so frustrating? Part of the reason is that every human is a complex, independent, unpredictable organism that rarely does exactly what we want.

On the other hand, is there something – anything – managers can do to lessen the need for babysitting? I believe there is. After observing management techniques and styles for three decades, and through a lot of trial and error of my own, I believe that a *system* of management must be applied by managers so we are fair to all employees. By doing so, we allow high performers to develop their talents fully, and we encourage poor performers to find positions that better suit their talents.

A *system* is defined as “a way of accomplishing something using step-by-step procedures.” In a recent seminar, I asked how many managers in the audience had a system for checking patients in upon arrival at the office. Virtually all hands were raised. I then asked, “How many of you have a system for working up patients in preparation for the doctor’s exam?” Again, near unanimity. But then I asked how many of the managers had a **system for managing their employees**, and no hands were raised. If we use systems in the front office, in billing and accounting, in working up patients, why don’t we have a system for the most critical element in a successful practice – the management of staff members?

The Five-Step Management System

The five-step system discussed in this article has proven to be comprehensive, easy-to-learn and apply, and extremely valuable to both experienced administrators and

new supervisors. It requires no special personality or charisma on the part of the manager and, if implemented fully, results in significant and measurable improvements in production, morale, and growth among staff members and managers alike.

Implementing this system is relatively simple, requiring that an administrator or manager take the time to learn the steps, teach these steps to employees, and follow up

to ensure each step is implemented. While management is responsible for taking the lead in addressing these important success steps, it is equally important that the employee share the burden of making the system work. With that in mind, I have included employee responsibilities that correspond to the steps of the management system.

The Five-Step Management System

Management Step 1: **Provide the Tools**

Management Step 2: **Provide Training**

Management Step 3: **Help Employees Set Goals**

Management Step 4: **Become a Resource**

Management Step 5: **Hold Employees Accountable**

Management Step 1: Provide the Tools

Management must provide the necessary tools for employees to effectively do their jobs. The tools required may include adequate space, computer equipment, written forms, a telephone, etc. If employees do not have the proper tools, they cannot be held accountable for accomplishing their work. Additionally, managers regularly need to review the effectiveness of these tools and update them over time to ensure ongoing efficiency as the business grows and develops.

Employee Responsibility Step 1: Use the Tools. Employees are responsible for using the tools the practice provides them. For example, employees must use to their full advantage the practice’s computer systems, office equipment, forms, phones, medical equipment, and any other tool made available by the practice.

Management Step 2: Provide Training

It is management’s responsibility to provide training for employees. Without proper training, employees can-

Continued on page 2

The Five-Step Management System

Continued from page 1

not be held accountable for accomplishing their work in the manner required by the practice. Management needs to make sure that training is given to each employee for each of the position's tasks. Training can be internal (on-the-job training from an experienced peer or a direct supervisor) or external (professional enrichment course or seminar).

Employee Responsibility Step 2: Apply the Training. Employees are responsible for applying the training the practice provides and seizing the opportunities for additional learning that management furnishes. For example, if the practice sends an employee to a seminar on improving collections, the employee is responsible for applying the methods they were taught to reduce accounts receivable.

Management Step 3:

Help Employees Set Goals

Management has the responsibility to help employees set meaningful goals for improving their work. By setting their own goals, employees are invited to become more intimately acquainted with the position and therefore more committed to the outcome of the job for which they are responsible. By engaging in the goal-setting process, an employee is given the opportunity to help direct the future of the position and establish a greater sense of job satisfaction. For this reason and more (e.g., team-building), it is best that employees set their own goals, which management then reviews and approves for appropriateness. If an employee does not focus initially on what the manager deems as a priority issue or on areas perceived as needing improvement, a manager may choose to intervene, asking the employee to work on those specific concerns by adding them to the employee's goals.

Employee Responsibility Step 3: Set and Work Toward Goals. Employees are responsible for improving their work through setting appropriate goals and for putting forth the required effort to accomplish those goals. Ultimately, only the individual employee can provide the energy and creativity that meeting a goal requires.

Management Step 4: Become a Resource

Once employees have the tools and training they need and have set goals for improvement, management needs to become a resource to help staff members overcome obstacles or assist when they have reached an impasse. After applying their best efforts, employees need to know that a team structure exists and that the guidance and direction of an experienced manager is readily available when they can make no further progress on their goals. For staff to look to management as a resource for assisting with their goals, managers must be available, approach-

able, and ready to listen with an open mind. A good manager encourages and supports employees without taking over the responsibility for accomplishing established goals. A manager must resist the temptation to micromanage or assume responsibility belonging to the employee.

Employee Responsibility Step 4: Ask for Assistance. Employees are responsible for asking for help when they cannot accomplish their goals by themselves. If employees need additional tools, training, or other resources to accomplish their goals, they are responsible for requesting that assistance from man-

agement. Employees should be trained to understand that seeking assistance is a strength, not a weakness, especially after exhausting all avenues toward solution through the utilization of available tools and resources.

Management Step 5:

Hold Employees Accountable

The final step in the management process is to hold employees accountable for progress toward the established and agreed-upon goals. Since goals are often set without full knowledge of all challenges that might occur on the journey toward accomplishing a goal, it is appropriate to measure success by progress made rather than simply by whether or not the goal has been accomplished in the projected time frame. Employees can be held accountable through regular reviews and individual interviews, which are also excellent opportunities to provide

Continued on page 3

Implementing this system is relatively simple, requiring that an administrator or manager take the time to learn the steps, teach these steps to employees, and follow up to ensure each step is implemented.

The Five-Step Management System

Continued from page 2

feedback: correction when necessary and commendation whenever possible.

Employee Responsibility Step 5: Be Accountable.

It is the employees' responsibility to account for their use of time, training, tools, and resources in carrying out their duties and achieving goals. Employees should report to their managers regularly on progress made on their goals. That accounting is best done in writing by the employee so there is a record of success.

Implementing the Five-Step System

If management implements the five-step management system and employees respond responsibly, staff members who truly are motivated and belong in the practice will flourish and increase their talents and value. Employees who are not committed – the poor-performers – will be uncomfortable with the pressure to set and accomplish goals and to improve their work, and usually will find alternate employment within a relatively short time. This

will present an opportunity for management to find new employees who can become high-performers and valuable additions to the practice.

Remember, the five steps that employees are responsible for are *complementary* to the five steps that are management's responsibility:

- 1) Management provides the **tools** needed = Employees use the tools provided.
- 2) Management provides the **training** employees need = Employees apply the training they receive.
- 3) Management helps employees set **goals** = Employees set and work to achieve goals.
- 4) Management becomes a **resource** to the employees = Employees ask for assistance when needed.
- 5) Management holds employees **accountable** for progress = Employees are accountable for reporting the progress on their goals.

Continued on page 4

Understanding the Under-Performing Employee

At times, management diligent in applying the five-step management system and in training staff members in the five steps of employee responsibility will find that an employee is making no progress in meeting goals. An example would be an employee who has set a goal to improve attendance and punctuality but who continues to miss work and arrive late. In the case where an employee has set a clear goal but is not making progress, the problem almost always falls into one of three categories:

1) The employee is untrained. A staff member may have received some training but may not understand it or know how to assimilate it into daily work activity. If the employee is untrained, the solution is to provide more training until that part of the job is learned and the employee in question can demonstrate its application or integration into the position held. For example, an employee who is consistently tardy may need to be trained in how his tardiness affects coworkers and patients.

2) The employee is unable. If the person has been provided with all appropriate training and still cannot meet the goals set for improvement, the employee

may be unable to perform the job requirements. For example, an employee who is required to be at her desk ready for patients at 8:00 a.m. but whose schedule doesn't allow her to leave her house until 8:15 a.m. will be unable to perform her job appropriately. The solution for this situation is to move the employee to a position where that individual can be successful. Sometimes, such a position may not be available within the practice, and that person's employment may have to be terminated so they can find a job that matches their abilities.

3) The employee is unwilling. At times, the employee has been appropriately trained, is able to do the job the way it needs to be done, and has set goals for improvement but simply makes no effort to change and improve. In this case, the person is unwilling to do the job the way the practice needs it to be done. The solution in this situation is to counsel the employee, candidly confronting the unwilling attitude, and asking for a commitment to immediate improvement. If the employee is not willing to promise quick action, or if the agreement is made without actual, substantive effort to improve, the only remaining option is to release that employee from the practice.

The Five Step Management System

Continued from page 3

The process for implementing this system within your practice includes these steps:

- Make sure you understand the concepts presented in this article and are comfortable that you can fulfill the five management responsibilities.

- Meet with your doctor(s) and present the concepts to them to ensure their support.

- Meet with your staff to train them on both the five steps of management's responsibilities and the five steps of their responsibilities. Be sure to ask at the end of the meeting if any staff members feel they cannot fulfill their five responsibilities. If you have supervisors who report to you, train them in the management system before meeting with your staff.

- Have staff members set goals for improving their work.

- Review the goals of each staff member and either approve the goal or help the employee modify it to make it acceptable. (If you have supervisors who report to you, they should set their own goals which you would review with them. The supervisors would review the goals of the staff who report to them.)

- Set regular intervals for your employees to report on the progress on their goals. Progress on long-term goals (e.g., receiving a certification) would be reported every few months. For short-term goals, such as reducing tardies,

the reporting period might be every week. If you require that employees report in person on their progress, schedule those interviews at the time goals are reviewed. If you ask staff members to report in writing, fix dates for when the progress reports must be submitted.

- Reward staff who accomplish their goals by sincere compliments and additional responsibilities as appropriate. For staff who do not strive to complete their goals, counsel them as needed and then take additional action up to and including termination, if necessary.

- As staff members complete their goals, have them set new goals for additional progress. Review the five-step system of management and employee responsibility regularly in your staff meetings.

More Success!

The five-step system of management and employee responsibility will help you keep valuable employees because they will enjoy the progress they make in accomplishing their goals. You will build teamwork within your practice as your employees work toward meeting similar practice goals and, at the same time, encourage poor-performing employees to find other employment. Implementing the five-step system will lead to greater overall success and reduced stress for management, employees, and owners alike.

About the author: Derek Preece is a senior consultant with BSM Consulting. He is based in Orem, Utah. Contact him at dpreece@bsmconsulting.com.