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Training Paths

A Proven Technique for Staff Growth and Development

By Derek Preece

To maximize the successful training and integration of a new employee, many practices incorporate the use of "training paths." A training path is a recommended learning strategy that sequentially lays out the training steps for an individual to follow for building conceptual baseline skills and knowledge. The purpose of a training path is to provide a series of training "events" that enable staff members to learn the key skills required in their positions. Once employees understand the concepts of training paths, they can help customize their own learning plans and progressively improve their abilities.

Typically, a training path will map six to 12 months of learning and should be organized to provide a foundation of basic skills followed by more advanced training. As a person gains competencies, a training path usually becomes more customized and extends for longer periods of time. Its value is not limited to new employees. While helpful in training new employees, the training path approach is also useful when "growing" a current employee into another valuable position within the practice.

Implementing a Training Path

Initially, management should develop specific training paths for every position within the practice. Training paths should be linked to the competencies needed for those positions and describe training steps that will allow new employees to gain those competencies. A training path characteristically includes the following elements:

- Goals for each of the skill areas required
- A description of specific training opportunities
- A time frame for completion
- Notes to identify resources for training

The easiest way to designate training paths is by position within the office. In other words, a specific path is followed by everyone who is hired as a receptionist; a different path is followed by new billing staff, and so on. Because people learn differently, it is wise to make information available in several different formats (e.g., video training, written materials, Internet forums, interviews with current employees, etc.). Training techniques and formats should include:

Classroom. A staff meeting provides an opportunity to present classroom training to staff members. Sending staff to off-site seminars is also a popular learning opportunity because it allows staff to expand horizons beyond the practice, develop a network of colleagues, and gain knowledge from their experiences.

Internet. This opportunity has grown substantially in the past few years, and many courses are available to help staff members learn their roles.

Shadowing. Following a successful incumbent is a great way to learn the "tricks of the trade." In turn, the new employee should then be shadowed by an experienced employee before doing the job alone.

"A Day in the Life." Staff members can find great value in experiencing life through the patient's eyes. New employees should go through the registration process, have a complete exam or consultation, and observe surgery. This helps them become better acquainted with their new roles and responsibilities while generating empathy for the patient experience.

Coaching. Direct supervisors should coach new employees in their new skills. Making this a part of everyday contact when the employee is first starting in the practice can prove to be invaluable. Regular coaching sessions using "case studies" of real-life job situations are excellent training opportunities.

Mentoring: See article below.

Stretch Assignments. Challenging employees to do assignments outside their comfort zone is a way to encourage learning. For example, if a person has never developed a budget before but is interested in eventually taking a managerial role, the person could be assigned to work with the current manager on the upcoming budget.

Teaching. Preparing to teach others a particular skill or concept requires complete understanding of that skill and anticipation of questions that might be asked. Provide opportunities for employees to teach specific topics to their coworkers. This is superb training for the teacher.

Audio/Reading. The increasing availability of audio downloads in MP3 format can make driving to and from work a learning opportunity. Also, reading articles or books from outside the medical disciplines can give employees new ideas for improving their work.



About the author: Derek Preece is a senior consultant and principal with BSM Consulting, an internationally recognized health care consulting firm headquartered in Incline Village, Nevada and Scottsdale, Arizona. For more information about the author, BSM Consulting, or content/resources discussed in this article, please visit the **BSM Café** at www.BSMCafe.com.

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Mentoring: Maximize the Value of Your Experienced Team Members

By Allan Walker

Learning and growth is critical to the sustained well-being of any staff. This is especially true in a challenging business climate that requires everyone to do more with less. Make sure you take full advantage of your more experienced employees: they can provide valuable knowledge and guidance to newer staff members. You do not have to set up a formal mentor program—where an experienced staff member is regularly or routinely paired up with a less-experienced employee to serve as an example and advise them as they advance—but taking advantage of your hard-earned canon of internal knowledge certainly makes sense, especially when more formal (i.e., offsite) training is expensive and time-consuming.

Your goal is to bring more value into the practice by identifying and providing qualified internal mentors who can use their expertise to help less-experienced individuals master their job responsibilities, advance their careers, enhance their education, and build their networks.

Initially, take time to accurately identify which positions can appropriately be mentored by another team member. Some positions do not lend themselves to a mentor approach, instead requiring direct supervision by an immediate supervisor. In addition, it is critical to determine which staff members have the ability and temperament to serve as mentors. Look for experienced staff who can balance their knowledge with patience and an ability to teach. Not everyone is built to be a mentor. Also, make sure the time spent mentoring by an experienced employee does not hinder the ability of the practice to function efficiently and properly. While mentoring is important, maintaining your quality of patient care is essential.

A mentor culture is a win-win for everyone: those serving as mentors are delighted to be recognized as able to contribute in a unique way, while employees enjoy receiving special attention from a respected and established member of the team who affords them the opportunity to expand their own knowledge base and develop new skills.



About the author: Allan Walker is director of publication services for BSM Consulting, an internationally recognized health care consulting firm headquartered in Incline Village, Nevada and Scottsdale, Arizona. For more information about the author, BSM Consulting, or content/resources discussed in this article, please visit the **BSM Café** at www.BSMCafe.com.

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Success Tip: See Training as an Investment

The reason training is often considered optional at many companies is because it is thought of as an *expense* rather than an *investment*. While it's true that training can be costly up front, it's a long-term investment in the growth and development of your human resources.



Learn More About Staff Training and Development

Editor's note: Additional tools, resources, and insight into the world of staff training and development are available in the the **BSM Café**, located at www.bsmcafe.com.