



Delegating Effectively: 3 Tips for Practice Managers

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Working with your medical practice staff would be a cakewalk if the only tasks you ever requested of them were simple to tackle, easy to complete, and well within their capabilities. In today's medical office, however, many physicians and managers often find themselves having to ask more of staff members than in the past.

The individual(s) assigned such a task may at first squawk. Anticipating such resistance will serve managers and physicians well.

Here are some tips to help ensure you are delegating new tasks to staff members in the right way:

1. Look for opportunities to delegate. On the path to getting things done, your quest is to identify all those things that you can possibly delegate to others and then prepare those others so that they have a high probability of succeeding. In the course of your workday there may be only a handful of things that you and you alone need to do because of your experience, insight, or specialized knowledge. Everything else that can be delegated should be delegated.

Some people feel they have to take care of everything themselves and to this day haven't been able to break the habit of "doing it all." If this someone is in your seat right now, recognize once and for all that as a category of one, you can only get so much done. Many managers and supervisors fail to delegate effectively because either they don't fully trust the people with whom they're working, or they've always been "get-it-all-done-by-myself" types.

2. Take time before you assign. Prior to delegating anything to anyone, take the time to actually prepare your staff for delegation. This would involve assessing an employee's skills, interests, and needs. You could even ask people what new tasks and responsibilities they would like to assume. You might be surprised at the wide variety of responses you receive. There may be people on your staff right now who can help you with tasks you've been dying to hand off to someone but didn't see how or when you could put them into play.

While you want to delegate to staff who show enthusiasm, initiative, and interest, or to staff who have otherwise previously demonstrated the ability to handle and balance several tasks at once, sometimes you have to delegate to someone who has not exhibited any of the above. In that case, delegate on a piecemeal basis. Ensure that the staff person is able to effectively handle the small task or tasks he's been assigned and does not feel swamped or overloaded. When the staff person demonstrates competence, you can increase the complexity of assignments and even the frequency with which you delegate.

3. Have an initial walk through. The first time you delegate anything to anyone, painstakingly walk them through exactly what goal you want them to achieve. Paint a vivid portrait of what things will look like once the task or project is completed. You may have some instructions to provide or training to offer, but otherwise don't necessarily be concerned with how the staff person will proceed. She may have a notion or two completely out of your realm that prove to be suitable and even appropriate for the task. Be available as much as practical although be careful not to encourage an environment of constant interruptions in which you cannot get anything done.

If it helps, plot regular intervals when you two will get meet to compare notes. Monitor project progress, offer additional guidance, and continue on.

As staff members begin to demonstrate their capabilities on the projects you've delegated, give them even more slack in terms of how they'll approach and complete the assignments. Forsake any over-controlling predisposition. Ideally, you've delegated enough authority for your staff to successfully complete the tasks by allowing them to make their own decisions and take initiative. You know you've delegated effectively when they're able to operate even in your absence.