



## Techniques for Managing an Efficient Office in the Midst of Change

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I've been there! A front office associate calls in sick; you're several days behind on your billing; there's a little squabble between your office personnel that may fester; you need to coordinate interviews to fill a vacant office position; your EHR is not working properly, and of course, payroll is due tomorrow. I haven't even discussed managing your physicians.... on top of all that, we are asking you to CHANGE!!! Yeah right...

Being an office administrator or practice manager is a tough, thankless job! You could run into any (and more) of the above scenarios, on any given day. While multi-tasking may seem like the only solution to such chaotic days, it's not. Instead, office administrators must become masters of crisis management and prioritization.

Being an office administrator is tough work, and not for the faint of heart. This article will give you some thoughts on gaining breathing room to make changes while keeping your employees and physicians running at full speed.

### **Evaluate your Work Landscape Daily**

Change is a constant in today's healthcare environment. As an office administrator, you must embrace change or it will drain your energy and soul! I've seen many a fine manager be buried alive in the minutia of medical office work.

Assessing your internal and external work landscapes is something that must be done daily, if not multiple times during the day. Organization is a key component in this technique. If you are not naturally an organized person, develop habits that will help you become organized. Many office administrators find it helpful to build in 5 – 10 minutes of quiet assessment time before the morning and/or afternoon sessions to develop a critical task list. How many Docs are working? Am I fully staffed? What are my "To Do's" today? What might blindside me today? Are there external issues that may impact today's work?

Developing a short list or mental notes will help your day run smoother and calm your nerves before the chaos begins.

## **Delegation is Your Friend**

You can't do it all... and you shouldn't do it all! Part of assessing your daily work environment is developing an understanding of what you can delegate. The natural mode of managers, "If I do it, I know it will be done correctly", must be re-thought! You must develop delegation skills.

As a manager, you have to know your employee's strengths and weaknesses. If you your front-line employees don't possess the necessary skills, arrange for training and development. You must be confident who you can rely on to run with the ball in difficult situation. Important front line skills for your employees include the following:

- Basic customer service
- Telephone etiquette
- Dealing with difficult patients/situations
- Equipment maintenance
- Medical terminology
- Ordering of supplies
- Merchandise receiving and distribution
- Office organization.

The following principles will help you become a successful manager during times of change:

- Hire capable people with multiple skills
- Delegate appropriate tasks to staff
- Constantly evaluate their work
- Give them appropriate feedback
- Delegate again

These delegation principles will improve your associates' skill level, create a more trusting and healthier work environment, and ultimately, take some responsibilities off your shoulders!

## **Touch Base with Staff Often**

An important part of being an office administrator is being a daily counselor and a cheerleader! You must have enough personal connection with each of your associates to rally the troops in order to face today's onslaught of sick patients. Just being their boss isn't enough when times get tough!

Touching base with each employee every day is an important part of managing. Many first-time managers struggle with employee relations. Finding the balance between knowing enough, but not know too much about your employees' personal life is an important skill to master. Don't get bogged down with your associate's problems! If there is an Employee Assistance Program or Community Mental Health system available, make good use of it.

## **Never Let Them See You Sweat**

Your office staff is watching you... always. In most offices, YOU are the center of strength the entire staff, even the physicians, draw from. When things get tough, you are the one that must "step up" and handle whatever comes along, calmly and efficiently. If it entails extra hours, JUST DO IT as part of the job, without being disgruntled. Model this attitude for your staff. I promise it will pay dividends!

Handle personnel issues immediately and objectively. The longer these “problems” are in the work environment, the more difficult they become to handle and the more damage they produce within the practice.

By the nature of your position, you are the “go-to” person. Take on that responsibility with pride, not reluctance - your doctors and office staff will thank you for it!

### **Build a Culture of Change**

Whether you fight it or not, change is going to happen! And whether you like it or not, most practice change involves the office administrator.

A culture of change is about discipline! Disciplined people, with disciplined thought, do disciplined action. A true culture of change involves everyone on your staff, including the physicians, truly being positive about change, and your practice having a systematic process of approaching and implementing change. Everyone in healthcare should not only expect change, but, in fact, relish it! Consider, the opposite of change is status quo, or worse yet, stagnation. In healthcare, we don't have that option.

### **Be Flexible...**

Not only externally, but internally as well. Everyday, something is going to occur that is unexpected. Being flexible enough to adjust your schedule, re-prioritize, handle the situation and move forward effortlessly is an attitude and a skill. As an office administrator, you must learn this skill or you flounder and fail!

Keep these thoughts and techniques of change with you as we move along this continuum called TransforMED...

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