Eli's Hospice Insider

Human Resources: Use These 4 Steps To Reach Increased Productivity

Ask the right questions and teach your employees to self-correct efficiency problems.

Your hospice may have well-defined productivity expectations, but how do you handle the employees who don't measure up to them? Try these tips to help employees self-diagnose issues and take ownership of their productivity.

Establish Employee Productivity Standards

The first step is to make certain employees know their responsibilities. The bulk of hospice care is delivered during visits -- the face-to-face encounter between the hospice interdisciplinary group member and the patient and/or family member -- so establishing visit productivity standards is vital.

"We assume that employees come to us automatically knowing how to plan and deliver an effective and efficient visit. Some do but many don't, particularly if the person is coming from a hospital or nursing facility setting," says **Susan Balfour, RN** with **Hospice Fundamentals** in Phoenix, Ariz.

Visits that lead to the best patient care and the most effective use of time have 4 easy-to-teach characteristics: focus and intention, respect of boundaries, skill involving other disciplines, and use of basic organizational skills, Balfour says. Make sure that your hospice is including this material during orientation and is treating the ability to shape a visit as a basic competency.

If productivity problems arise, take the following steps:

1. Create a Correction Process

"It's easy for us to identify process problems and think that they are someone else's to fix," Balfour says. The trick is to help your frontline staff to identify what elements of the problem they have control over and then figure out what they can do to solve them, she says.

When you do identify a problem with an individual employee's productivity, having a process in place will help you to make corrections quickly. Balfour suggests the following steps:

1. Make certain that both the manager or supervisor and the employee agree that there is a problem. If the employee doesn't agree that they have a problem, you won't be able to achieve much correction because you will be working at cross purposes, Balfour says.

2. Encourage self-diagnosis. Help employees to figure out solutions to their own problems.

3. Provide training or retraining as needed

4. Agree upon a time to see a resolution to the problem. This shouldn't be open ended, Balfour says. You need to agree upon a time when you will see the results.

5. Stay the course. Don't let productivity problems fall off the radar. You can't forget to come back and check how the correction is progressing, Balfour says. This sends the message that the employee doesn't really need to work on course correction because to them the problem seems to blow over.

"We are doing people, our agency and the community a favor when we stay the course" with correction plans, Balfour says.

2. Ask the Right Questions

You can guide employees to self-correct productivity problems with questions such as the following, Balfour advises:

"What do you think that you are doing differently than your co-workers who are not having the same difficulties with time?" This encourages employees to take a look at their own behavior.

"In what area do you feel that your practice can be improved?"

"What additional training do you need?"

"In what non-visit areas could you improve your time management?"

You will likely know the probable answers to these questions, but employees may surprise you by requesting something they need that you have overlooked, Balfour says. Asking the right questions will help you and the employee get to the heart of the problem.

Bonus: These questions can also help employees to realize "I am responsible for this problem in some way," Balfour says.

3. Establish a Correction Plan

You don't want to automatically fire every employ who is struggling with your productivity standards, Balfour says. You "would be losing people with a lot of great resources and skills." To make sure you give everyone a chance, cover the following bases with your correction plan.

Planned education and any other training interventions. Include a completion date to help ensure these items are acted upon.

Measureable outcomes. This could include goals such as decreased overtime, an increased number of visits, decreased visit lengths, documentation turned in on time, etc.

Negative consequences that will occur if the employee doesn't accomplish the agreed upon corrections. If you don't have any negative consequences in place then you could have done a lot of work for naught, Balfour says. "That's essentially saying 'we're going to say it's important, but really nothing bad is going to happen to you'. It's also horribly disrespectful to employees who are meeting the standards."

Date of reassessment and the next meeting.

Signatures of employee and supervisor. Signing the plan makes it a serious agreement, Balfour says.

4. Monitor Your Plan

If you don't follow through by tracking your employee's progress, you're wasting all the time you've put into your correction plan. Monitor progress by doing the following:

Hold to the reassessment date and to the measureable outcomes.

If goals are not met, take a second look at the plan of correction. Did it include everything the employee needed to reach the desired outcome? Was it really doable?

If the plan was well thought through and the person hasn't accomplished what was required, decide whether to extend the period allowed for improvement or to apply the negative consequence.