

Commitment to Excellence in Directing an Activity Department

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The responsibilities are numerous when one is the Director of a Therapeutic Recreation Department. It is expected that that we need to develop a person-centered activity calendar and offer innovative and creative programming that will meet the diverse needs of our residents. It is imperative however, that the Director of the department create a culture of excellence for the workplace.

Many department Director's are responsible for providing data to the quality improvement team regarding the outcomes of the departmental goals. It is important that the goal has a measurement to hold individuals accountable for the results. Measuring is done to align specific leadership and employee behavior that will cascade throughout the organization and drive results. The more we measure the important things, the more we'll know about where we are making progress and where we are not. The more we know, the more we can affect behaviors. Engage the employees in the department in the tasks of the quality improvement study. Ask for their input. Make sure that they know that the work they do helps an organizations short and long term goals, and that you will make them accountable.

Our staff want to be fully recognized for a job well done, they believe that reward is respect made visible, and 79% of employees leave their managers due to lack of appreciation. It is important to find out how the staff like to be recognized. Develop a simple preference sheet that could include their favorite beverage, snack, color, candy. Find out what their hobbies are, and what special occasion that would like to have recognized (e.g. work anniversary, birthday). Provide individual team members with those preferences when they go above and beyond for a co-worker, complete a difficult project, or show excellence in their work. Provide departmental celebrations for activity professionals week, therapeutic recreation week, or nursing home week. Write a note on a card for the employee when they have done something that you want to thank them for. Encourage them to write thank you notes to each other. Send a thank you note to their home at least twice a year recognizing their hard work on a project, or other milestone they have completed. Team morale will increase, appreciation for team members will increase, and the department will be recognized for the teamwork in many areas within the organization.

As the Director, it is an important component to the job to create and develop leaders. In order to have great leaders, you need to invest in them. Work with the best performers and develop a peer interviewing team. A department works best with a team that all can trust and look to for assistance.

After the Director conducts the initial interview and tour, the peer interview team can meet with the candidate and ask their own behavior based questions. The Director shouldn't send a candidate through to the peer interview team that they are hesitant about. The peer interview team should have the last say and the Director needs to respect their decision to hire or not.

Take time every month to sit with each employee and find out on a one to one basis what is working well. Find out what you could do as their boss to make their work experience better. Find out their concerns and follow through with helping through any difficulties. And, find out if they would like to recognize any of their peers for exemplary service, either to the team, or to the residents. As a Director, you will learn a plethora of information if you take this opportunity, it can be very valuable, and your staff will feel motivated and appreciated. We can't motivate our employees, they motivate themselves. Great leaders create a culture in which people are more inspired to motivate themselves.

Make sure, as the Department Director that you manage up your employees during your monthly meetings with your administrator. Share when things are going well. This gives the administrator the opportunity to connect with the staff in a sincere way. This will in turn, let your staff know that they are appreciated and valued in the organization.

Material referenced from *Hardwiring Excellence* by Quint Studer