



Is My Staffing Adequate?

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Will I be able to cover this shift next week? Is the weekend coverage in place?

These are questions every person working in the Senior Living industry has asked. Staffing has become one of the biggest challenges encountered in the senior housing industry. Proper staffing is not only integral to the day-to-day mission and operations of providing quality care to residents, but also crucial to meeting the ever-increasing staffing-targeted regulations (including in the residents, facility, and staffing assessments required by the Megarule), ratings criteria and batch lawsuits. Many variables play into the decisions related to staffing: care and services, financial accountability and meaningful employment.

In today's regulated world of senior care, the ability to hire and retain a responsible staff member has become more difficult. We know the challenges, but there are also solutions to address the growing shortage of caregivers.

So, let's examine both care and services. Providing a level of care that meets the needs of the residents and even goes the extra mile can be tough with even the best of teams; finding what attracts the "Gold Star" employee is even more difficult. While you want to hire the best staff member, finding staff members can present a challenge, one that many healthcare professionals face on a daily basis.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Do I have job descriptions and interview processes in place? Have I defined the characteristics for which I am looking? Do you have a hiring "team?"
- Do I have Managers, Mentors and Management Training policies and procedure in place to help new hires succeed in their jobs?
- Do I have incentives or provide acknowledgements for a job well done? What are the opportunities for growth and development?
- Do I offer a competitive salary? Childcare? Benefits?
- What are the perks of working for my company versus another healthcare facility?
- How do I keep that star employee once I find him or her? Does he or she "fit" in the organizational mission?

Use the following guidance to help answer these questions.

Hiring

A very wise manager that once said, **"hire really good people, it will only make your company look good down the road."** **And she was right! How can you do this?**

Determine who you are looking for and what characteristics, interpersonal skills, skill sets and competencies provide the person-centered service of a Gold Star employee. **Remember, clinical skills can be strengthened and/or taught, but behaviors and values, communication and team compatibility are not easily instilled in a new hire.**

These key components of the potential new hire need to be assessed within the first interview. Developing a team that has specific goals and criteria to look for these traits may help in weeding out the not-so-desirable employee.

In addition to the Human Resource staff or the Director of Nursing, consider including a CNA or a housekeeper on the hiring team. These team members may sometimes pick up on issues that would be beneficial when deciding 'yes' or 'no' to a prospective employee. Also, consider adding a resident to your hiring team. After all, the residents are the ones that will benefit from the hiring of a new team member.

After the hiring process, in order to gain insight, you may want to consider completing an entrance interview to determine what attracted the staff member to your facility and the position available. The information gained may provide information for future hires.

Competitiveness

Have you done a salary analysis of comparable facilities close to you?

Now is the time to determine how your salaries stack up against competing facilities. Money should not be the determining factor for taking a job in your facility, but it should be a part of the decision.

What perks do you have for your employees when it comes to sick leave, or childcare?

Sometimes partnerships with community organizations can help both entities. Consider reviewing the many flexible staffing options that are available to help meet not only the facility needs, but the individual needs of the staff. Addressing cultural differences of employees may lead to a happier workforce if their distinct needs are recognized. Also, establishing a mentoring

program for new hire employees could help alleviate many of the frustrations that come with having a new job. Ensure that managers are well-trained to train and manage the new employees so that they have the best chance to succeed.

How does the opportunity for growth and advancement look within your company?

Are there any programs such as tuition reimbursement, or a fostering program that allows your company to encourage staff to return to college for higher degrees?

There are many benefits to having a program that allows a CNA to work on his or her Nursing degree, while still being full time employee. This situation is a win-win for the staff and the facility!

Perks

Let's not forget feedback and rewards.

Millennials comprise the largest percentage of the American workforce. This group is high touch, high maintenance and wants to balance work and life. Flexible scheduling and the ability to think outside the box or “not like we have always done it” gives validation to this section of the workforce.

Cloud-based shift management programs that are transparent and interactive on a real-time basis can help keep shifts filled cost-effectively, yet provide the flexibility, transparency and engagement that employees want. Being an engaged leader who is willing to demonstrate care and attention to detail and rolls up their sleeves to work alongside new employees may go further than anything else you can offer. Tangible rewards can send a valuable message to your staff that they are important and that you appreciate their contribution to the team.

Retention

With the largest pool of new employees being driven by factors outside of the baby boomers traditional sense, considerations to details are vital. Conducting team huddles throughout the day for problem solving may add benefit and relieve frustrations for your team.

Have you surveyed your staff team to ask, what makes this a good/poor place to work?

You may be surprised to learn their answers. Many employees change jobs based on how they are treated and if they feel respected, more so than for any other reason. Although the culture of retention has changed over the years.

The money that comes with travel nursing is enticing to young nurses. The days of staying at one company for more than twenty years appear to be over. A company's loyalty to its staff has also changed; the mindset of “what can we as a company help you with that would encourage you to remain employed with us” also appears to have disappeared. Yet, we must ask ourselves and our employees how we can better train and manage employees to

succeed. In some areas, the pool of qualified, targeted potential employees willing to work in the long-term care industry is diminishing. The industry must do a better job of training and managing for success. Effective employees make the workplace and your entire team successful.

Let's close by talking about the underbelly of the staffing dilemma. Healthcare in America today is challenging, and there is an ever-changing dynamic of healthcare employers competing with all other employers for entry-level positions. Healthcare is not a glamorous career; it is a hard job requiring responsibility for the care of someone's mother, father, son or daughter. We all, as caregivers, signed up for this responsibility, but today, many potential employees would rather make ten dollars an hour working in the fast food industry than in the senior living industry helping someone bathe and dress, eat and use the restroom. Their job expectations may differ from ours. As a result, it is important to be flexible and willing to make reasonable compromises regarding compensation and other aspects of the job. Once hired, it is important to provide mentoring, training and oversight of the employees to enable them to succeed.

Although the concessions and mentoring, training and managing efforts may seem costly, they are ultimately less expensive than proceeding understaffed or “wrong-staffed” with new hires that will leave and have to be replaced. Devoting the time and resources to making new hires successful in the long run are beneficial to residents, staff and the company. After all, as caregivers, we signed up for this responsibility!



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