The Impact of Layoffs and Employee Turnover on Those Who Remain

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Sensitivity to staff dissatisfaction and/or stress is key to maintaining an efficient and smoothly run operation.

Think about the last time you had to let go one of your employees or the last time one of your employees resigned. Loss of staff, regardless of the reason, surely interrupted the workflow of those who were left, and the remaining employees probably felt the brunt of any repercussions resulting from those situations by having to assume more responsibilities. In addition, they most likely were left feeling vulnerable and insecure. Because the successful operation of an ophthalmology practice is so dependent on the goodwill and morale of the staff, you need to ensure that your employees are not overworked or unhappy.

Permanent or Temporary
The first thing to do after letting an employee go or after an employee resigns is to reassign that employee’s job responsibilities to the remaining...
employees. Your decision to replace—or not replace—the departed employee can have a significant impact on other employees. If you plan to hire a replacement, then your current employees may not mind picking up the slack temporarily. However, if you have decided to eliminate the position, you need to be conscious of the additional work you are placing on your remaining employees.

Research shows that American workers feel overworked and overwhelmed by how much work they are expected to do. Feeling overworked can affect employee

- job performance
- retention
- personal well-being
- relationships

Job performance. Job performance is affected when employees feel pressured to work very fast, very hard, or on too many tasks at one time. Consequently, employees have trouble focusing on their work and do not have enough time to get everything done. Don’t make the mistake of assuming that by getting the most work out of your employees you are maximizing productivity. Pay attention if your employees are complaining about inefficient office procedures, unrealistic deadlines, too many interruptions, and an unreasonable workload. Every employee has a breaking point where work simply becomes too much.

Retention. Retaining talented employees must remain a priority for your practice. Turnover costs a practice not only financially, but also in terms of patient and physician satisfaction. Keeping good employees is critical to facilitating good communication with patients and increases the bonding between patients and the practice. Yet if these good employees feel overworked, they may turn to other employment opportunities. These employees will be in search of a less pressured job, or a job with fewer work hour requirements. Hence, the proverbial “the grass is always greener on the other side” will dictate their move to new employment.

Personal well-being. Feeling overworked can negatively impact an employee’s health, thus leading to increased sick leave and consequently, less productivity. Even low levels of stress can cause individuals to quit. Not to mention that, as an employer, you may experience rising healthcare costs as a result of your “sick” employees’ increased utilization of the healthcare system.

Relationships. Feeling overworked can also negatively impact an employee’s personal relationships. Especially if the employee has to work extra hours, he or she may feel that there are not enough hours in the day to accomplish all the necessary tasks at home. The stress is even greater if you require any of your employees to carry a beeper and be “on call.” The overlap of an employee’s job with his or her home life generally creates tension within the family.

Job Satisfaction Tips
As an employer, you need to balance out the need to get the work done and the amount of pressure you apply to your staff. You can gain satisfaction from knowing you have created an environment in which your employees enjoy the work they do.

Before ignoring employee complaints of being overworked and overwhelmed, consider the potential ramifications. Overworked employees are more likely to make mistakes at work, feel anger toward their employers, resent less hard-working coworkers, and look for a new job. However, few ophthalmology practices have made job satisfaction a top priority.

In addition to ensuring that you have a sufficient number of employees to meet your practice’s needs, here are some suggestions for keeping your staff happy and not feeling overworked:

- Where possible, allow schedule flexibility to employees who prefer to work only certain days or more non-traditional hours.
- Where possible, allow employees to work from home.
- Establish a congenial, comfortable working environment.
- Ensure that every employee is doing the job he or she is best qualified to do.
- Avoid the Peter Principle.
- Redesign work to reduce wasted or low-value time.
- Periodically update your employees’ job descriptions based on work that needs to be done and on work that they are best qualified to do.
- Ensure that your staff salaries and benefits are competitive.
- Listen to and investigate bona fide complaints made by your employees.
- Encourage your employees to take all of their entitled vacation time.

As the practice’s administrator/manager, you need to understand and appreciate that sensitivity to staff dissatisfaction and/or stress is key to maintaining an efficient and smoothly run operation. Proactively work to prevent such issues from arising in your practice and be prepared to handle such issues should they arise despite your best efforts to prevent them.