

Is Your Laboratory the “Employer of Choice”?

Every laboratory has 2 types of customers—internal and external. We know that the physicians, nurses, and patients are our external customers. We should know as well that laboratory employees themselves are our internal customers. Considering all that we do for our external customers, it’s just too bad that we don’t put as much effort into attending to internal customer service.

I recently saw an article in a non-United States publication about being an “employer of choice.” The writer defined an employer of choice as one that “attracts, optimizes, and holds top talent for long tenure because the employees choose to be there.” For-profit business and industry employers of choice have realized higher return on investment, higher levels of customer satisfaction, and lower staff turnover rates than their competitors. Perhaps such key activities practiced in these organizations can be used in the laboratory environment. Why not? Hospitals are going to extraordinary effort to attract and retain nurses. Why can’t laboratory management choose to do the same for laboratory employees?

The article described 7 key activities to foster a culture that values employees as much as it values its other customers. I’ve paraphrased a description of these activities and described how both savvy laboratory managers and staff employees can build these activities into key quality system essentials (QSEs) such as organization, personnel, and customer service.

1. Leadership style: Facilitative leaders are more successful than autocratic ones. Whether you are a manager, supervisor, team leader, or staff member, using a decision-making style that empowers people to contribute provides more creative, innovative, and productive solutions to work processes and problems. Encouraging staff input cultivates the thriving of staff talents.

2. Recruitment: Thorough, open, and honest recruitment is the best policy. Ensure that each job title includes specific qualifications, skills, knowledge, and tasks. Use competency-based selection methods to ensure that recruits meet these requirements. Explore with interviewees the behaviors and values that are essential for the best fit with your laboratory’s culture. Be realistic and objective when describing your laboratory’s strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities. Clearly describe the career potential, growth, and learning opportunities your laboratory offers.

3. Learning culture: A learning organization accepts learning as an investment in the laboratory’s future. Include cross training, mentoring, and continuing education as job requirements. Include an employee’s solicitation and completion of learning activities as a performance standard component of your organization’s performance management system.

4. Work schedules: Work-life balance is important to employee health and satisfaction; however, the laboratory is usually a 24/7 environment. Work schedules need to accommodate both service and balance without either suffering for the sake of the other. Tap employees’ creativity for work schedule ideas that are reasonable and fair while achieving the staffing objective. Allowing employees to have some say in the work schedule is also part of participative management.

5. Compensation and benefit programs: It’s unlikely that laboratory compensation will ever be equivalent to that of the nursing profession. However, laboratory managers need to work with the organization’s human resources departments to stay on top of marketplace salary trends to lure good talent. Find ways to recognize and reward performance that contributes to team efforts and improves quality.

6. Communication: Adults in the workplace need a sense of the bigger picture so they can see where their individual contributions fit. Create and foster a communicative environment that keeps staff up-to-date on laboratory performance, future plans, and the contribution of the laboratory’s goals to the organization’s success. Listen to—and act on—employee concerns, ideas, and suggestions. Clearly communicate work processes and procedures.

7. Integrity: Nothing damages a relationship as much as distrust. Be fair and honest. Hold integrity as a core value in all employee and laboratory activities and live up to that value. Perception of lack of integrity at best creates ambivalence, which can lead to disregard and decreased performance. At worst, lack of integrity causes the best talent to seek employment with competitors.

Laboratory directors and managers should ask whether they are doing the best they can in all 7 areas and work to fill any identified gaps. Laboratory staff members should ask if they are contributing positively in each of these 7 areas as well. A good working environment is a 2-way street. Are you an employer of choice? Are you an employee of choice?

This Month’s Quality Quote:

“The definition of total quality management is: Totally satisfied employees serving totally satisfied customers.”

—Anonymous

Send comments/questions to
lmberte@worldnet.att.net.



Lucia M. Berte
MA,MT(ASCP)SBB,DLM;
CQA(ASQ)CQMgr