How to Fire a Physician or Staff Member the Right Way

February 18, 2015
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Source: Physicians Practice

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Though parting ways with a physician or staff member is never fun, there are a few things you can do to make the experience better for both sides.
1. MAKE SURE IT’S NOT A SURPRISE

When it becomes time to officially part ways, it should never come as a surprise. Firing a physician or staff member should be the last step in a long series of conversations where you have given direct and actionable feedback concerning performance, communication, or fit.

These conversations should be candid and transparent, with both sides discussing the problems and possible solutions. If you do this right, it creates a win-win situation where performance either improves — I’ve found eight out of 10 employees improve when given feedback and the tools to succeed — or you can part amicably, knowing you both tried to make it work.

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2. TREAT PEOPLE WITH DIGNITY AND RESPECT

Ending a professional relationship can be incredibly frustrating for both sides. Making a scene may feel good in the moment, but believe me, it doesn’t do any good in the long run.

If you have had candid conversations leading up to the termination, it will feel honest and natural to refer to the parting-of-ways as a “mutual agreement,” rather than a firing.

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3. EXPLAIN THE “WHYS”  

When a team member is fired, the last thing you want is for others to fear they could be next. Make sure to explain the situation in a transparent, but respectful, way. It’s OK to share which performance measures or expectations were not met, but make sure you stick to the facts and leave opinions or hurtful language out of the conversation. Don’t say anything you wouldn’t feel comfortable mentioning if the former team member were standing in the room.

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4. LEARN FROM EXPERIENCE

An exit interview is a crucial part of the process. As an employer, it’s important to know if there was anything that could have been done differently to change the outcome or to prevent similar problems in the future.

I’ve found that going back to do a second exit interview several months later can be even more helpful. Generally as time passes, emotions dull and both parties can be more objective in discussions.

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5. KNOW THAT SOME MISTAKES ARE NONNEGOTIABLE

In every organization there are certain actions that result in immediate termination. At CompHealth, for example, not following our core value of integrity and ethics is a fireable offense.

In these situations, a long series of conversations is not necessary, but it is the responsibility of the employer to clearly — and frequently — communicate the consequences of not abiding by that commitment.

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No one wants to be fired — and no one wants to be the person who has to let someone go.

But as long as you have the tough conversations and offer the tools, resources, and leadership support, you can part ways knowing that it’s the best decision for both parties.

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One of the best parts of being the boss is that you get to have a say in building your team. It's great to be able to surround yourself with people you enjoy being around who share similar goals and make the team stronger.

Unfortunately, it doesn’t always work out that way.

Along with the ability to hire comes the responsibility to fire. I’ve learned from experience that not every new hire ends up being the right fit. Though parting ways is never fun, there are a few things you can do to make the experience better for both sides.

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