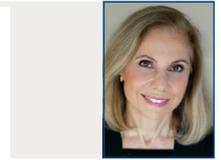


By Cynthia Matossian, MD, FACS



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Job descriptions: Is it written down?

If not, then don't expect staff to do that task. It's really simple.

I will share two practice maxims: finish all tasks assigned, and presume nothing, regardless of how obvious it seems to you.

Both aphorisms apply to our written job descriptions. We expect our employees to fulfill their responsibilities to the letter of their descriptions, and their supervisors to ensure their staff know what those responsibilities are.

THE NLR

I have not invented anything new here. Type "clear job descriptions" into a browser, and you will see many articles on its importance. Here are two important points, according to the *National Law Review*. They:

- Set clear job expectations.
- Help support hiring, disciplinary, promotion, compensation and termination decisions.

Employees perform better if they know what their tasks are. Knowing what is expected of them helps define in their own mind the breadth and depth of their responsibilities. Otherwise, how can an employer expect that person to complete and be held account-

able for those tasks? We make sure each person understands his or her job responsibilities.

FORMALITIES

Every position, including my own, has a formal job description. It is reviewed every year. We do this because of constant technological changes to the health-care landscape. What somebody did a year ago may not be the best way to do that job today.

Every January, we ask all employees to review their printed job descriptions and tell us what responsibilities still apply and those that don't. If they have taken on additional tasks or if something was taken away, we encourage them to document it. We ask the same questions of the person's supervisor; we compare notes to make sure employee and supervisor are on the same page.

The new job description is reviewed, revised with private comments from the employee, and then the information is collated for the entire department.

PAYOFFS

The time-consuming side of having such a detailed job description is obvious; but so

too should be the positive reasons. For one, raises. We look at regional salary or hourly pay rates and compare those to the employee's whose raise we are considering. If there are job description matrices attached to those rates, we take those into consideration. This helps us cross-compare our pay rates.

Another positive is cross-training. Our front desk has four positions. Check-in also verifies referrals; scheduling handles incoming calls; check-out collects out-of-pocket payments and makes most follow-up appointments; and the call center tracks down lost patients and makes confirmatory appointment calls.

At one time, each person spent equal time switching from position to position. But no longer. Because of our new review and assessment process, we identify which staffer handles which position best. Who remembers faces? Who can say how will you pay today, sir or madam, without falling for a story? Now, the one with that skill stays in that job most of the week, with only a half day in another position so she doesn't lose her skills. **om**