

SWOT: This Time It's Personal

Tips for developing a comprehensive action plan with realistic short- and long-term goals and objectives to improve your practice.

BY ALLAN WALKER

Successful, proactive management teams regularly conduct strategic planning sessions that focus on the current state of the practice. A major component of strategic planning is a SWOT analysis that identifies a practice's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. Insight gleaned from a detailed SWOT analysis is essential to developing a comprehensive action plan that includes realistic short- and long-term goals and objectives.

Successful, proactive practice administrators should regularly conduct a personal SWOT analysis, as well. Periodically assessing individual strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats is a recommended exercise that can rejuvenate, refocus, and inspire. While a personal SWOT occasionally may reveal uncomfortable information (that's OK), the drill likely will help you feel better about yourself and your practice.

To turn weaknesses or threats into strengths and opportunities, answer the following SWOT questions detailed ahead.

AM I HAPPY?

A happy leader directly impacts the mood and productivity of staff. Look around and determine what you like most about your position, your coworkers, and your work environment. Focus on what makes you feel good at work—what excites and motivates you as a practice administrator. Don't dwell on the negatives. While not every work moment is pleasant, adopt a positive management attitude and style that makes you feel like everyone is headed in the right direction. It is important to recognize that workplace satisfaction and happiness go beyond the four walls of your practice—a positive life-in-general outlook is beneficial to your overall personal and professional health.

DO I FEEL GOOD ABOUT MY PROFESSIONAL GROWTH?

Challenge yourself to grow professionally. Never become too comfortable with yourself, your position, or your sur-

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roundings. Doing so can lead to stagnation and burnout. Over time, the duties of a practice administrator can become routine and even mundane. That comes with experience and having faced situations that seem to repeat themselves. It's easy to respond to these situations without exerting much thought or energy. Instead of taking the easy path, challenge yourself to be the best practice administrator possible by setting stimulating professional goals and objectives that will help you and the practice become better. Look for exciting, new solutions and ways to do things. Find the time to pursue the continuing education track you've eyed for years, or seek out a respected colleague at a meeting and "talk business." Keep learning and challenging yourself all the way to retirement ... and beyond.

AM I PROVIDING THE LEADERSHIP REQUIRED BY MY POSITION?

Your staff looks to you for leadership, guidance, and strength. Are you giving them what they need? Today's unique and fluid business climate mandates that leaders be adaptable and flexible. Leadership techniques, processes, and protocols that worked well in the past now might need re-assessing based on organizational consolidation, job description changes, or any number of other "today" workplace issues. Continuously assessing your role in the practices' leadership,

training, and decision-making chain of command will make you more responsible and responsive to identifying and meeting the changing needs of management, staff, and patients. Continue to assess and hone your leadership skills. Commit to making improvements in areas you feel you are lacking.

AM I COMMITTED?

Time can breed complacency. Ask yourself if you are as enthusiastic and committed to your job as you were the first day you walked through the door. If you are not committed to being the best practice administrator of the best practice, you need to find out why. You are the link between owner/physicians and staff; you are the person everyone looks to for answers and action. You need to be “all in,” and it needs to be obvious.

AM I A PROBLEM-SOLVER?

Empowering others to take ownership of problems and challenges is good leadership, but only if you are taking responsibility for you own. Within reason, are you the roll-up-the-sleeves, take-charge problem-solver your physician/owners need? Are solutions being discovered and implemented as quickly and efficiently as they should? Make sure you are part of the solution, not part of the problem. Stress that problems presented without solutions are unacceptable. Training staff to own their problems is great—it teaches responsibility, creative thinking, and self-reliance—but it is essential to remind everyone that all problems should be presented with possible solutions. Then, it is up to you to act.

DO I SET A PROPER TONE/STYLE FOR THE PRACTICE?

While it can be stated in a number of ways, what you likely are trying to do as a practice leader is establish an overall “culture of success.” You want to create a respectful, courteous, professional setting that inspires staff loyalty and motivates them to provide the best possible service to patients. To accomplish that, you need to embody what you want out of your employees. Set high, but realistic standards — and follow them. Dress nicely, be punctual, and treat everyone with respect and compassion. Staff will mirror your actions.

DO I PROMOTE CAMARADERIE?

Everyone in a practice basically is part of an extended family; they spend nearly as much time at work as they do at home or with friends. Do you encourage staff to enjoy each other’s company and provide opportunities to celebrate individual and practice successes appropriately? If not, you should. Staff models that promote a fitting amount of pro-

fessional and social interaction will reward management with increased productivity and harmony.

DO I UNDERSTAND THE MISSION AND VISION OF THE PRACTICE?

The practice mission and vision statements need to be more than just words to you. These documents need to be well-constructed, high-level road maps for success, each meaningful and inspiring to staff members as individuals and the practice as a whole. As a leader, you need to review these statements regularly and act and speak in a way that demonstrates that you have a clear understanding of what they mean.

AM I WILLING TO WORK IN THE TRENCHES TO HELP OUT WHEN NECESSARY?

If you want to foster a “team player” mentality with your staff and gain maximum respect from employees, don’t be afraid to roll up your sleeves and help out every once in awhile when needed (and when appropriate). Your reward is a staff that models your collaborative spirit and is willing to go to any length to provide excellent patient care. It also forces you to know and understand exactly what your team does, which can provide valuable insight into various management issues.

CONCLUSION

Today’s hectic and challenging work environment requires leaders be as grounded, effective, and efficient as possible. Taking the time to conduct a meaningful self-assessment can help identify individual improvement opportunities that will enhance a practice’s competencies and fortify its foundation. ■

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