

## A Manager's Perspective

# How to Get That Great Job!!

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The marketplace for PTs and PTAs has changed. That is not news to you. What was once a virtually feeding frenzy for therapists and assistants is now much less glorious. Good jobs still exist. The need for the excellent therapists and assistants is no less, but the demand has certainly dropped. Please note the difference between need and demand – we often do not differentiate between them, but they are distinctly different.

These days, there seems to be an excess of candidates for the number of jobs that come available. This situation is dramatically different from the times when good jobs were left open because there were few, if any, qualified candidates. As managers, we have had to shift from trying to just round up a candidate pool to having to wade through a knee-deep stack of resumes from qualified candidates. From a manager's perspective, we have had to develop new, improved interview and candidate differentiation strategies to make sure the best candidate was selected.

From the candidate's perspective, new, improved skills and strategies are also needed. This column will focus on what those skills and strategies are and how every candidate can stand out in a crowded field. The rest of this column will be primarily addressed to clinicians who are considering (voluntarily or not) entering the, sometimes crowded, job market.

Clearly, one factor that is essential to consider for every clinician is the DOCUMENTABLE level of clinical expertise that they bring to the position. The emphasis is on "documentable" because virtually all clinician-candidates will present themselves as strong clinically. Without adequate legitimate documentation of a higher level of clinical expertise, every clinician-candidate's claims are often easily dismissed. Documentation may include testimonials from qualified professional colleagues and previous supervisors, evidence of advanced credible course/lab work, and advanced degrees or field experience in credible clinical settings.

Nothing can replace clinical excellence, however, many managers can define excellence in a variety of ways. Excellence may imply better clinical outcomes to many managers. These are often difficult (and never quick) to demonstrate. Other managers may equate excellence with high levels of productivity, strong relationships with referral sources or clinician independence and autonomy. When dealing with issues of excellence, it is often necessary to carefully define the terms from the employer's perspective.

A key area that is not quite so nebulous as excellence is your level of basic and advanced business skills. This complex of skills is collectively referred to as leadership, administration and management process (LAMP) skills. Four critical beliefs, espoused by the APTA Section on Administration are found in a position paper referred to as the LAMP document by the Section. They are:

- ?? "LAMP skills are required of all physical therapists, not just those with the title of manager.
- ?? LAMP skills are necessary for the development of the effective professional.
- ?? Business values promote the core values of physical therapists; they are not mutually exclusive.
- ?? Physical therapists must be competent in the development and assessment of all types of outcomes, including both clinically related functional and business-related operational outcomes."<sup>1</sup>

A very effective way to differentiate yourself in the job market is to demonstrate a high skill level in these LAMP skills. Clearly, you will be more valuable as an employee with a strong understanding of the reimbursement environment, the ability to work well and negotiate effectively with case managers, or a strong track record of excellent patient documentation and low third party rejection rates. Other LAMP skills related to supervision of staff and students, appropriate delegation of clinical duties, mentoring of fellow staff members and a strong commitment to continuing professional development will cast you in a strong light with potential employers.

I believe that, with the exception of clinical excellence, there is no better way to stand out in a crowded employment market than to demonstrate that you truly understand the business side of rehabilitation. The ability of each and every employee to act as a manager/owner of the practice can have a significant impact on the overall success of the clinic.

Clinical decisions that you make, with a full understanding of the business and financial implications for the practice, will be more readily supported by administration and your influence within the organization will increase. In short, employees who understand the business side of therapy are more influential internal and external to the organization. Managers consider business savvy employees to be better employees. As a business savvy clinician, you are a much stronger candidate for the best jobs.

Now you know the secret to landing that great job – develop and communicate strong business skills. As an adjunct to excellent clinical skills, you can be head and shoulders above the rest of the candidate pool for the job you really want. I'd love to hear your opinion on this topic.

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### References

1. Section on Administration, American Physical Therapy Association, Position Paper on Leadership, Administration, and Management Process. November 1998.