

Why Manage Anyway?

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You are already a manager.

Whether you like it or even know it, if you are a rehab clinician, you are a manager. You may not have the title, the pay or the corner office, but everyday you manage your patients, your schedule, possibly students and many other aspects of your daily routine. The skills that you use to manage these activities are exactly the same skills that are at the core of being a "real manager."

I have felt for a long time that we have had a serious shortage of management and leadership within physical therapy. This is not to say that the talent is not there; it clearly is. Rather, I have felt that there is a tremendous untapped pool of strong leaders and managers who simply have not yet stepped up to the plate. Hopefully, this column will help you examine where you are related to stepping up to the plate, and help you weigh the relative rewards and costs of becoming a rehab manager.

"I did not go to PT school to sit in an office. I want to do what I do best—treat patients."

There are many reasons not to become a manager. First among them is that you just don't have your heart in it. I have known too many managers who felt forced into the role because of organizational circumstances who have struggled to find happiness in the role.

Others may want to avoid the manager role because they just want to do their job and go home every night. Not paying attention to the world around our profession is not a great idea, but some therapists choose that option. Many potential managers have stayed away from the role because of a concern about supervising staff who were previously peers. Although this can be tricky, there are many successful managers who can attest to the fact that it can be done well.

Other staff therapists simply refuse to give up their patient care time—even a small portion of it.

The final "reason" that I hear from therapists who say they are not interested in management positions is that the nature of the job is too heavily based in finance and politics. While it is true that a good manager assures the financial and influential success of the department or clinic, the relative weight of these roles is most often determined by the individual manager. There are choices available within the role of manager.

Why Manage?

As is the case for any decision, there are challenges and opportunities in deciding to pursue a management position. When I talk to therapists who are interested in becoming managers or experienced managers about what is attractive about being a manager, many similar themes arise. Rehab managers are in a position to really make a difference in the overall development of the PT service within their organization or community. There are also many opportunities to stay more informed of the health care environment and potential challenges.

Certainly, some managers enjoy, or even crave, the power, title and financial rewards of management. Others focus on the potential for additional personal and professional development.

How to Get Started

There are probably as many ways to get

started in PT management as there are potential PT managers. Here are some suggestions if you decide you want to pursue the management track in your career:

1. Join the managers' forum in your area. This will give you a chance to interact with experienced managers and benefit from their experience. If you do not know if you have a managers' forum in your area, ask around, contact your local APTA district or chapter, or the Section on Administration of APTA (800) 999-APTA.

2. If there is no managers' forum in your area, start one. The Section on Administration has developed some suggestions that can help you get it going.

3. Make an appointment to talk to an experienced and respected manager in your area. Ask them why and how they became managers. Ask them what parts they enjoy and what parts they dread. Ask them if they have any advice for a novice interested in learning more.

4. Watch the managers around you. Good or bad, you will learn by observing. Identify actions and behaviors that you would like to emulate and those that you would avoid.

5. Take a management class at a university, community college or through the APTA or other health care organization.

6. Pick up a book on management. Ask a manager for a recommendation.

7. Tell your manager that you are interested in learning more about management and whether it should be a career path for you. Ask your boss to help (mentor) you in the development of your management skills.

8. Create a plan to develop your management skills. Make sure it is an objective, measurable plan so you can tell how you are progressing toward your goals.

Necessary Skills

There are a wide variety of skills that a good manager needs. The exact mix depends on the specific job and staff you will be managing. There are several fairly universal skills that most managers require:

- Strong communication skills—verbal and written
- Planning skills including analysis and project management
- General leadership skills—many of these are based in listening and commu-

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nication

- Negotiation skills—you will need to negotiate many things in your career, even more when you become a manager

- Financial analysis skills—they are not tough to acquire, just foreign to many of us as clinicians

- Networking skills—one of your key resources will need to be the ability to get the job done without continually re-inventing the wheel. Network among successful managers (your peers) to learn how others are doing it.

The above list could be much longer. Try making your own by interviewing managers to ask them their opinion. How you go about it is up to you, but if you want to become a manager you will

need to develop a plan and then you will need to work to see the plan become real.

Becoming a manager should not be undertaken without significant resolve. It takes energy and effort. But it can definitely be well worth the effort. I know it has been for me; it can for you, too. ■

- For more information, contact the columnist via e-mail, Pkovacek@flash.net or see his Web site at www.theFOCUSgroup.net.

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