

New Year's resolutions refined for the lab

As 2010 begins, permit me to offer a collection of New Year's resolutions for the lab. Taking a cue from some common personal resolutions, here are a few you can apply to the workplace.

Spend more time with family and friends. The lab schedule can help staff spend more time with loved ones. Modify the work schedule to assist staff in accommodating one another's scheduling needs. When annual reviews roll around, reward those with a positive attitude and willingness to be flexible. Encourage staff members to occasionally get together outside work for enjoyment. Working with people you know and like is easier. Team-building exercises, potlucks, staff picnics, and parties can pay big dividends in the workplace.

Get fit. Does your institution have a fitness or wellness program? If so, encourage staff to take advantage of it. Fit people take less time off for sickness and have higher levels of productivity. If there is no fitness program, create one or find outside opportunities for your staff. Some gyms and spas will offer group discounts to institutional members. Share workout videos and books. Jog or walk as a group during lunch or after work. Form a team for an upcoming charity walk-a-thon. Map out an indoor walking course, including stairways, to use during inclement weather so technologists can take short walking breaks during the day. Acknowledge staff members who make the effort to be fit. Be a good role model.

Eat healthier. If employees are healthy, healthcare costs may be reduced. Offer an alternative to the high-calorie snacks and drinks in the vending machines. Petition the institution to keep healthier alternatives available, especially for those who work off-hours. Take turns bringing in healthy treats instead of cakes and pastries. Introduce

"Fresh Fruit Fridays," where management provides a selection of fresh fruit to staff to encourage healthful habits. Be creative and add "Water Wednesdays" and "Mixed-Veggie Mondays!" Share healthful recipes through a newsletter. Find out if a weight-loss group such as Weight Watchers meets nearby or can start a gathering at your institution. Health promotion efforts also show employees that you and your company care about them.

Get out of debt. In this day and age, institutions as well as individuals need help managing finances. Sell or trade in equipment no longer in use. Take the extra time to shop around and find the best deal. Set up a Web exchange to get those who *need* equipment and supplies together with those who *have* them. This can help the lab pass along used items that are still serviceable and obtain items for trade or low cost. This works for office supplies and uniforms, too. It not only saves money, it is green!

Learn something new. Make sure staff has the time available to take advantage of educational opportunities. Off-site continuing education (CE) programs are often nixed when budgets are cut, but there are some cost-saving measures that should be explored. Gather and distribute a list of websites offering online continuing education. Look for live online presentations, and schedule meetings so the entire staff can take advantage. Look into ways to partner with other institutions to bring in guest speakers, minimizing travel and off-job time while saving money and sharing expenses.

Help others. Find ways that the lab can provide outreach, and think of new ways to do it. Providing lab tests at the health fair is an easy fit. Technologists could offer their expertise at a diabetes support group. Check the local newspaper for support groups, nursing homes, charities, and schools that could benefit

from knowledgeable volunteers.

Get organized. Even in this era of electronic storage, labs still have to track of volumes of "stuff." Revisit your retention policies for records and samples, and "clean house" regularly. Make sure inventory processes are efficient.

Update the resumé. Qualified, productive people are the lab's greatest asset. Learn new ways to keep your capable and motivated staff. For an "out-of-the-box" way to think about management, check out "The Dream Manager" by Matthew Kelley. The author offers a tale of a company plagued with high turnover and how a dream manager improved morale, productivity, loyalty, and profitability.

Reduce stress. Job stress is, after all, part of working. Find out what aspects of the job are most stressful for staff; and, if possible, revise workplace policies and placement to make some aspects of the job less stressful. Offer stress-management education as part of the CE curriculum.

Travel. In these days of tight budgets, visit with colleagues in other labs in your area, either through professional groups or in a more informal way. A colleague of mine traveling out of town on a long weekend took a few hours to visit a local outreach lab. She came home with a better understanding of how other facilities are run, which inspired her to suggest a few ideas to management that led to improvements for her institution. If you have staff willing to go the extra mile (literally), make sure it is recognized, especially in annual reviews. □



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