

You Hold the Key to Achieving Job Satisfaction

Patrick Lynch

The key to BMET retention hinges around money, job security, benefits, appreciation, flexibility, technical growth, professional growth, independence, empowerment, being part of a well-respected organization, and being part of a team. In this article, I will discuss what biomedics can do if they are dissatisfied with their current situation because of any of the previously mentioned criterion. The suggestions I make are based on my 30 years as a BMET—25 of which have been supervising others. Advice I provide are based on my observations, so you should exercise caution when trying them—especially if your situation is so inflexible as to not permit change or tolerate any attempt at change. In other words, proceed at your own risk.

Money

First of all, let's ask ourselves—what is pay? The most common reason cited for job dissatisfaction is low pay. But how do you compare your pay to someone else's? You ask them. And trust them to tell you the truth. It probably is the truth but not the whole truth. Be very skeptical. When you ask someone what they earn, they often inflate what they earn or quote you the amount from their W-2 form. This includes base pay, on-call, overtime, maybe an auto allowance, and maybe a bonus. If you compare their total pay to your base pay, you'll probably be disappointed. Compare base pay to base pay. Evaluate overtime, on-call, and other aspects of the job separately. The only fair comparison is to find local pay for the same job that you are doing. Comparing an in-house job to a traveling job or a Louisiana job to a New York City job isn't fair or accurate.

Patrick Lynch, CBET, CCE, has been supporting medical equipment in hospitals for 30 years. He holds degrees as a technician (AAS), engineer (BET), and businessman (MBA). Lynch is certified as a CBET (1979) and as a CCE (2004). He manages the biomedical engineering department at a 600-bed hospital system in Atlanta.



If you do find a discrepancy in your pay compared to similar jobs in your area, there are several possible reasons. First, your employer may not have an appreciation or knowledge of what you are really doing for them. Make sure you aren't doing your job in a closet. Make sure you have satisfied customers talking about how well you do your job and how much time and money you save them. This should be a year-round activity and not just when you are looking for more money. Administration can tell when you are asking for compliments and when they are spontaneous. Spontaneity is always better.

Second, there may be a new employer in town who changed the job market instantly. Pay scales and demand may change rapidly. We recently had a large (one of the big three) imaging company come to town and started

hiring everyone they could find. As a result, they caused me to scramble to keep my staff but not before I lost a couple of excellent people.

Third, your employer may just be taking advantage of you either deliberately or because you've been there a long time. There is such a thing as salary creep where an incumbent employee actually loses ground over the years to newer hires. Almost nobody is going to just give away money they don't have to. If you are a quiet employee (and not a squeaky wheel), you may have just slid into a low pay situation over time.

Start by researching on your own. Check with the U.S. Department of Labor. Check out www.payscale.com, contact recruiters, and call other workers in similar jobs with similar responsibilities. Check your paper and inquire about any similar jobs you see. Find out what they are willing to pay you.

When properly armed with all the information you can gather, respectfully approach your human resources department. Request that they conduct a salary survey because you have information that your pay may be out of step with the market. They will probably ask you for any information you have gathered. Salary information on biomedical engineers is scarce, so any sources you may have will speed their work greatly. They will be appreciative.

You may have to wait until they get around to you but they should follow through and perform the research. When complete, they will either regrade your job and give you an increase or explain to you what their evidence is that shows you are being fairly compensated.

This technique should work equally well whether you are dissatisfied about base pay or on-call pay. Overtime is pretty well controlled by the government.

Job Security

Everybody wants to know that they'll have a job next week, next month, or next year. If you aren't sure about yours, examine the reasons why you might not have the job security you think you'd like. If the employer is about to go out of business, there might be very little you can do.

If your employer might be acquired by another company, try to make sure that you are known to be a valuable asset to the company. If the company expects a consolidation, make sure you can outshine whomever you are pitted against. Companies are smart and they usually retain the best.

Benefits

Here you are at the mercy of the corporate standard benefits package. Occasionally, benefits are negotiable. It is possible to get an extra week of vacation when starting a new job—especially if you are making concessions in other parts of your employment. This is usually not possible after you have been on the job for some time.

To make sure your voice is heard, volunteer to be on an employee group that assists human resources in selecting the benefits program options. Each renewal period, there are usually many options and companies available to your employer. They want to minimize their cost by maximizing employee satisfaction. If there are certain benefits that are more important to you, get involved and let it be known what you value. You have a real chance to affect future benefits that your company offers.

Appreciation

Everyone wants to be appreciated and told that their work is appreciated. Surveys show that this is the number one job satisfier. If you want to be appreciated, start that culture in your organization. Be open, friendly, engage in small talk, and get to know your customers on a personal basis. If you start complimenting others for what they do, it won't be long until the entire culture begins to change and you'll start receiving some of the praise back. But if everyone else is being praised except you, you might want to examine your attitude—does it need some readjustment?

Flexibility

Most people like to have some flexibility in their job. Others cannot function with uncertainty and require the structure that a very rigidly defined job provides. If you find yourself in a job that does not agree with you, research ways in which it might be modified and talk to your boss. If you can show why the positives outweigh the negatives, your supervisor might be willing to let you try a slightly changed job. If not, you must either adapt, go elsewhere, or try to outlive your boss.

Technical Growth

This is the place where most hospitals miss the mark. Technical people love technology and learning new things. If you take away learning opportunities, they become rapidly disgruntled. I know of no quicker way to

assure employee turnover than by refusing to educate BMEs. But hospital administrators are afraid to invest the large sums that are required to train BMEs. With service schools costing \$5,000 per week (plus expenses and time away from work), administrators see it as an expenditure that has no guarantee.

They are not buying a physical asset that can be inventoried, used to generate revenue, and protected from theft. They are buying an intangible. Will the BME I train be able to translate that training into actual savings for the hospital? Will the BME quit in a week, a month, or a year and take their training with them? Will my training them just give them better ammunition to get me to pay them more? Will the additional training make my BMEs more hireable by my competitors? Will they be recruited by the very company who I am paying big bucks to train them?

These are questions that keep administrators up at night as a training request for \$25,000 sits on their desk awaiting their decision to approve it or not. You must address these concerns one by one.

If you want training, you need to first of all resolve a major problem in hospitals. Training and travel budgets are viewed as discretionary spending by administration. Almost all of travel budgets in hospitals are for nursing and other conventions. The payback of these general conventions is poorly defined, and most administrators think that they are just big parties with a few educational sessions thrown in to justify traveling to nice cities such as New Orleans and San Diego.

You must distance yourself and your training from these types of travel. Administration must know that technology changes rapidly and that your ability to continue saving them money (and deliver all the other benefits of in-house service) is dependent upon acquiring the knowledge to perform the job. This is only possible through manufacturers and other companies like DITEC, RSTI, Source One, etc. Convince administration that biomed training is NOT discretionary—it is just as vital as having a safety analyzer or a screwdriver. Without it, you are out of business.

The other major question is about your quitting soon after the training. Draft and sign a form that states you

will pay back the cost of the education if you voluntarily quit the hospital within two years after receiving the training. This should quell any fears about you leaving and serves as a sign of trust to your administrator.

Professional Growth

This is closely related to technical growth and emphasizes the need to master entirely new technologies. Moving from general biomed into imaging, management, laboratory equipment service, or ultrasound service are challenges that require personal dedication to learning the equipment and service problems, patterning after someone who is successful, and convincing administration and the equipment owner that you can deliver better and cheaper service through improved response time and less downtime.

In order to be allowed to move into a new area, you must be viewed as someone who accomplishes what they set out to do. Many times in the past I have studied up on a technology, learned how to provide the service, and waited for several years until the current provider messes up and replaces a superstar field engineer with a rookie. The customer gets frustrated with the poor service. I am then ready to step in with my plans already in place.

It can be difficult to get administration to spend money on knowledge-building resources that you won't apply for several years, so you have to be smart about this one. When you are at a conference, slip into sessions dealing with new technology or about something you currently don't know much about. Stretch your mind. Like a balloon, a mind that is stretched never returns to its old shape or size.

Independence

If you want to be free to set your own priorities and plan your job as you see fit, you must have a track record of good decisions. Do you often mis-state things, sloppily make errors, and are generally lax about aspects of your job? Or are you correct 100% of the time. If you open your mouth, can everyone be assured that you are on track, accurate, and that the subject is well thought out? If you are reckless,

“If you have a history of sound decisions, you will be allowed the freedom to make those decisions in the future.”

emotional, unstable, and blurt out things that are half-baked, you are not ready for independence—no matter what you think.

Empowerment

If you have a history of sound decisions, you will be allowed the freedom to make those decisions in the future. Basically, bosses are like everyone else—we like to make our work easier. If letting you make some independent decisions is easier than correcting your occasional error, we'll probably do it.

Pride

People like to be proud of anything they are associated with. We're in healthcare because we want to make a difference. And we want our hospital and department to be looked upon with envy. Pride starts with you. Are you proud of the way you look? Are you proud of the work you did today? Are you proud of the way you treated your customers, coworkers, and the public? Ultimately, we can only control the things we personally touch. So make sure that with everything you touch, you can have pride in it. It just might be contagious. Pride comes from within.

Teamwork

Face it—life (and work) is easier if you have a comrade to share with, to lean on, to vent to, and to bounce ideas off of. And a team is just a bunch of comrades. If the give and take is evenly distributed, there are people to take your slack when you need it and for you to help when they need it. What do you do if you are in a situation where there isn't much of a team attitude? Start your own. Be the kind of worker who you would like to work with. Pretty soon, you'll have a team of two. Maybe it'll grow beyond that. When people see how a team mentality changes the work environment, the rest of the department will probably join in. But don't be exclusionary—then you've got a click—not a team. And that can be even worse.

None of us has a perfect life. Some things are out of our control. Indeed, it seems that more and more things are out of our control. That's even more reason to have a little piece of our world that we can control. Our workplace is just such a place. We, as BMETs, are lucky that we possess special technical skills. Applying the same logic and understanding to our jobs gives us a good chance of changing them—at least a little. ■