

A Pitch to Stay Put: Avoiding the Job-Hopping Syndrome

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Do you find your job challenging and satisfying? Or has it become too routine or too stressful (sometimes in the same day), leading you to consider other jobs and perhaps other careers?

Medical technology offers broad opportunities for professional growth, and many people work at one company for most of their careers. That may reflect high job satisfaction or simply limited alternatives, especially in relatively small fields.

In previous generations, staying with one company for 30 or more years was the norm, but an increasing number of professionals today are attracted to the challenges and stimulation that come with switching jobs every two or three years. But what can employers and employees do to counter this trend?

Employee Retention: The Manager's Role

Wanderlust is common to young professionals in many fields—they may become easily bored and tend to think the grass is greener somewhere else. Understanding what motivates younger employees can help managers provide the support and resources needed to keep these employees from moving on.

So what actions can managers take to maintain or increase employee retention? “For any employee, long-term or short-term, put them in a position where they can be successful, let them be successful, and then recognize them for that success,” says Ken Maddock, corporate director of biomedical technology services at Baylor Health Care System in Dallas.

Managers and more experienced co-workers should also consider the following strategies when working with newer employees:

- **Help with career plans.** Managers need to work with each employee to develop a career plan tailored to his or her individual needs and aspirations. For those with management potential, provide opportunities to develop those skills, such as training other employees or sitting in on interviews for new hires. And for those who don't exhibit management

Check Points

Are you in a career slump or perhaps looking at other job options because of budget cuts or layoffs? Consider the following resources to help you regroup:

- ✓ Visit your college's career center. Many schools provide career guidance and resources to alumni, as well as to current students.
- ✓ Research volunteer organizations. Many offer short- and long-term opportunities for medical technology professionals and can add valuable experience to your resume, as well as renew your interest in your chosen field.
- ✓ Pursue a second degree or a certification. While the time and financial commitment may be significant, boosting your credentials can open doors both at your current job and at other organizations.
- ✓ Consider a switch from a hospital to an independent service organization, or vice versa. The new challenges may be just what you need to get back on track.

potential or are not interested in a supervisory position, consider retraining or job rotation to stimulate enthusiasm in employees who may feel their jobs have become stale.

- **Offer training opportunities.** Training is essential to achieving career milestones in the fast-changing environment of medical technology. As Chuck Sidebottom, chair of AAMI's Board of Directors and director of corporate standards at Medtronic, says, “You need to invest in developing the people who are part of the organization. Otherwise, they won't stay, or they won't be the kind of employees that organizations will need long-term.” A modest investment in training can have a host of benefits, including loyalty to the company, a fresh set of challenges to tackle, and a more skilled employee.
- **Recognize achievement.** Facing many pressing demands, managers can easily forget to recognize

and praise employees for a job well done, but knowing that their skills and efforts are valued is vital for many employees.

- **Offer flexibility.** Offering flexible hours and the opportunity to telecommute, when appropriate, can boost morale as well as save on fuel costs. For employees who can't telecommute—BMETs, for example—summer hours, comp time, or even a casual dress code can go a long way toward increasing job satisfaction. Employees are often less likely to consider other job options when it may mean giving up lifestyle perks.

Experienced staff can act as mentors to younger, less-experienced staff on both a formal and an informal basis. Mentors can help with technical challenges, career advice, office politics, or work/family balance. Some organizations have formal mentoring programs; at others, mentoring relationships evolve informally.

The Employee's Role

Whether you are in an entry-level position or in senior management, the most effective way to keep your job fresh and stay motivated is to take ownership of your career. Many young technicians just out of school have yet to learn that “there's more to their career than fixing the next broken thing in front of them,” says Glenn Scales, CBET, a long-time employee and current patient safety specialist at Duke University Health System in Durham, NC. Some individuals may be content being a technician for 30 years, while others may yearn for new challenges but not seek them out because they fear failure. Take control of your career with the following strategies:

- **Take on new responsibilities.** It can be risky to move beyond your comfort zone, but seeking out new responsibilities is what makes a job exciting and rewarding. You could volunteer to take on additional tasks or suggest to your boss that you switch jobs with another technician.
- **Look into educational opportunities.** Many companies encourage staff to pursue additional training. Consider courses given by trade associations, lectures at a local biomedical society, or classes at a community college—all of which may qualify for tuition reimbursement. Attending conferences can also be helpful. “The greatest value in attending a conference is often not in the formal meeting but in socializing and trading experiences with peers in other organizations,” says Scales.

- **Seek out variety.** Look for opportunities to participate in new activities—sign up for a committee or volunteer for a special project. Don't limit yourself to your department. Interacting with different people may re-energize you.
- **Learn from co-workers.** Think about approaching co-workers who may be able to help you do your job better. Some would be flattered and eager to share their skills and insights, and your manager will be impressed by your initiative.

Know When to Say When

While staying in a job may be beneficial in some cases, sometimes changing jobs may be the better course—for the organization and the employee. The following are some issues to consider:

- **Would changing jobs advance your career plan?** It's helpful to map out career goals with realistic time lines for achieving specific milestones. Then you can assess whether you are more likely to advance in your current job or by joining a new organization.
- **Are you in a temporary job slump?** It's important not to leave because of short-term dissatisfaction, whether that is caused by an unreasonable workload or a disagreement with your supervisor. Rather, take an objective look at the pros and cons of your job. “Don't ever do this analysis and act on it while you are frustrated,” says Maddock. “Take a deep breath and make sure you are being objective.”
- **Do the goals of the organization match yours?** If your organization's goals or your own have shifted, it may be time to reassess whether your priorities are still aligned. If not, it may be time to consider other job opportunities.
- **Are employees given the recognition they deserve?** Organizations that experience high turnover tend to be those where there is a pervasive tendency to underappreciate the talents and efforts of staff. If your current supervisor is causing you frustration, pursue other positions within the organization. If that management style is pervasive, you may want to consider other job opportunities.

As Maddock puts it, “The bottom line is that if you are working for an organization in which you believe, you should stay unless you are really stymied in your efforts to grow.” ■

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