

# Job Swapping Program Takes Technicians Outside Comfort Zone

Cathy Cruise

Most of us are hardwired to our routines and perform the same basic work each day. While this may feel secure, it can also keep us from exploring greater opportunities in our careers. Alan Koreneff, corporate director of the Clinical Equipment Management Program (CEMP) at Novant Health recently found a way for some promising biomedical equipment technicians (BMETs) to step out of their comfort zones, develop leadership skills, and experience professional growth.

Koreneff created an innovative professional development program based on an existing Novant leadership initiative, to bring burgeoning leaders to the forefront of Novant—a healthcare system that includes 12 hospitals. “We’ve been adding a number of facilities and appointing supervisors,” Koreneff says. “We tried to identify individuals who had expressed a desire to go into management or move up in their careers. But we wanted to make sure they were ready to be promoted—to fill the pipeline ahead of time.”

From March to November 2009, 14 participants worked in teams on projects outside their areas of expertise—no one was allowed to focus on his or her own field. Projects covered four areas: instrument sharpening and scope repair, contracts database, Pyxis services, and coil repair. The program began with an orientation meeting, followed by required monthly meetings with project mentors. Within each group, one manager was selected as a leader to offer guidance, make connections, and try to retrieve all available data on a particular subject. “We tried to give them a broad range of things they would do and face as they go into management, and it was specifically geared to the clinical engineering aspect that would



help our organization,” Koreneff says.

Initially, the idea of stepping into a new field was a hard sell to participants. “When we first got them together and announced what they would be working on, they weren’t very happy,” Koreneff says. “They kind of grumbled about it and wanted to do things that were more related to their own fields.”

Quickly, though, participants found the work intriguing and the new opportunities appealing. “I wasn’t sure what to expect,” says Todd Rumble, a BMET at Forsyth Medical Center, a Novant facility in Winston-Salem, NC. “I was just hoping to do something new and learn things that might help me in the future.” Rumble was assigned to the contracts database team, which was asked to locate companies that offer software to create, report on, and manage contracts. “I normally work on monitoring equipment and networking so I like dealing with service and equipment people,” he says. “But software people—even their language is totally different. They use lots of acronyms and I had to learn a lot just to keep up with what they were saying. Researching different companies and getting quotes was also something I’d never experienced before.”

Rumble found the research and time required for the project to be its most challenging part. His team was simply given a base price for the software needed and then



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told to find it. “I started by Googling contract software management for healthcare to find and research companies,” Rumble says. “The amount of time it took really surprised me.”

Jeremy Collins, systems analyst II for the CEMP, worked as part of the coil repair group. He says the experience gave him a chance to expand his knowledge. “I knew theoretically what a coil was, but if you’d have laid them on a table, I couldn’t have picked one out,” he says. “It was nice to build some base knowledge of coils and repair techniques. It was challenging—going from zero knowledge to basically being proficient. At least now I can discern one coil from another and understand what a vendor is talking about.”

On the instrument sharpening and scope repair team, Dwight Biggs, corporate supervisor of radiology engineering for the CEMP, initially wanted “to acquire a better understanding of Corporate Novant and the management structure,” he says. “I was excited about the opportunity to see a side of Novant and its hospitals that I was unfamiliar with.” Biggs’ team was asked to explore the possibility of partnering with a vendor to bring instrument sharpening in-house, and subsequently to reduce costs and improve service. Again, obtaining proper data for the project turned out to be the toughest part. “The most challenging aspect was acquiring accurate and detailed information to complete our project,” he says, noting that the help he received was crucial. “The program was structured in a way that everyone in the organization was willing to help each team succeed.”

Biggs recalls being struck by the difficult logistics requirements of instrument sharpening and repair. “I was surprised at the complex and challenging aspects of this requirement that appears so seamless from the outside,” he says. “Also, the cost, and difficulty of managing that cost with many different vendors, was surprising as well.”

The “career swapping” experience was especially eye-opening to the team that investigated bringing Pyxis services—an automated pharmaceutical dispensing device—in house for Novant’s pharmaceuticals division. “They basically knew what Pyxis was but had never dealt with it before,” Koreneff says.

At the project’s completion, teams presented their work to senior managers, which included Koreneff, the director of logistics, and the supply chain vice president. These individuals then began to deliberate over which projects would move forward—a process that is still ongoing. For

the next year, the teams will put approved projects into action and learn new skills on the implementation side. The scope repair project already has been given the go-ahead with a request for proposal (RFP) out now to select a vendor partner to help in the transition to in-house scope repair and instrument sharpening, says Koreneff, who estimates a saving of \$600,000 next year.

In-house coil repair will be next, and team member Collins is eager to move forward. “There will be a definite cost savings,” he says. “The end solution we worked toward was looking ahead at costs, equipment, and general expertise needed. We will handle a gradually increasing percentage of lower-end repairs, then hand off the higher-end repairs to vendors. In return, those vendors will provide the training for the lower-end, in-house repairs.”

While saving money is a major benefit of the program, the greater understanding of medical equipment, departments, and facilities can’t be undervalued. Koreneff expects to see a difference during Novant’s next annual service meeting. “Now, all these people have been exposed to other areas and know what other technicians in these areas are talking about,” he says. “They have a broader view of what the people they meet up with every year actually do.” ■



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