

## Staff Management Tips

Small or sole practitioner firms frequently have a loosely structured support staff. There are many duties to juggle in a small firm. So, the smaller the support staff, the more that staff become “jacks of all trades” in order to keep things running. This becomes a challenge, however, when all or many of the duties are priorities. If juggling these multiple priorities becomes out of balance, work production becomes less efficient, staff experience greater stress and often morale declines, all compounding the efficiency problem. It is time to do a little re-structuring or revising of office procedures.

Suggestions for Increasing Staff Efficiency –

### 1) **Adapt a Team Approach**

- a. Lead your staff, don't order them. Military persons give orders; teams have leaders. Leaders make their instructions clear and lead by example.
- b. In a team, each member makes a valued contribution. In a smoothly-functioning law firm, each team member compliments the other.
- c. In a team approach, one member's success is dependent on the success of the other members.

### 2) **Schedule Routine Staff Meetings.**

- a. Start a weekly or bi-monthly staff meeting routine. Schedule it for three or four meetings in advance, same time, same day of the week. It's easier to make a habit if the schedule is consistent.
  - i. In addition to the staff meeting, allow time for each staff to meet with you individually, confidentially
  - ii. If you have to give criticism of a staff member, it is always best to do it privately.
  - iii. If you want to commend a staff member, it is best to do it privately UNLESS you can honestly commend the other staff, too.
- b. Let your staff know your concerns and your ideas as to how to work to fix the problems, e.g. work schedules, attendance, tardiness, work priorities.
  - i. As owner of the “business” it is your right, and duty, to lay out your expectations of the people you employ.
  - ii. The benefit of informing your staff of these concerns in the staff meeting forum, as opposed to informing them individually in private meetings, is that the staff feel they are not being picked on personally. It's simply a matter of you needing to better manage your practice.
  - iii. It is your responsibility to set the “tone” of your office, e.g. up-beat, professional, treat your staff as you would want to be treated
- c. Ask your in-house “experts,” (your staff) their concerns and ideas for how to fix the problems

### 3) **Job Descriptions**

- a. Ask your Staff to list what tasks they spend their days performing and indicate percentage of time they feel they allot to each task daily. Have them do the same for weekly and monthly. This gives you a more realistic view of what they spend their time doing.
- b. Perhaps you will have to reassign duties based on Staff input.
- c. Put it in writing. Name of the job position, job duties, skills required, skills preferred, and performance of those duties.
  - i. Lead staff person: You and the lead staff person will have to fine-tune all the support staff duties; in particular, those s/he will be responsible to do and those s/he can delegate to other staff.
  - ii. Legal Assistant: Per our discussion, you indicated Legal Assistant's main duty is billing, as well as copying, preparing transmittal letters to clients, specific types of filing and miscellaneous tasks as needed. Be sure to detail the "miscellaneous tasks." Substantial time can be devoted to miscellaneous tasks.

### 4) **The "Plan"**

- a. Plan the new procedures
- b. Plan to implement the new procedures in a particular order
- c. Plan for success
- d. Document the plan, clearly and concisely
- e. Don't implement changes too fast or frequently.
- f. Follow the plan consistently.
  - i. Old habits are hard to break. If you need help staying to the new plan, recruit a "coach."
  - ii. Each team member can be a coach to the other team member to keep on the Plan

### 5) **Performance Evaluations.**

- a. Performance Evaluation Forms
  - i. You can find these at office supply stores (Office Max, Staples)
  - ii. Samples can be found in HR or Employee publications
  - iii. Create your own form, which should include the following areas:
    1. Accomplishments: Document your acknowledgement that the work employee is doing meets your expectations
    2. Areas the "Need Improvement"
    3. Goals for next year or other designated term
    4. OPTIONAL - Areas in which Employee Excels: Areas where employee is exceeding expectations
- b. Using the Performance Evaluation Form:
  - i. You evaluate each staff.
  - ii. Each staff member evaluates themselves.
- c. Compare your evaluation with each staff person's evaluation

- i. Meet with staff individually to review the evaluations

6) **Incentives**

- a. The least expensive, most effective, form of incentive is positive feedback for good performance. Give it freely, but sincerely. Constructive criticism is more effective in the presence of sincere positive feedback.
- b. Never forget the power of the “carrot.” This is particularly helpful if morale is low or staff feel unappreciated. Remember: An incentive reward must be held out in advance of the work to be done.
  - i. Bonus. There are two kinds:
    - 1. You have a lucrative year, and share your wealth with your staff. You are rewarding them for their loyalty and, hopefully, for their valued contribution. However, the control over achievement is mostly in your hands.
    - 2. Extra pay for your staff for a significant accomplishment within the same amount of hours worked. The control over achievement is in their hands. They feel more personal satisfaction.
  - ii. Perks:
    - 1. Extra time off
    - 2. Flexible work schedule
    - 3. Job-sharing
    - 4. Take to lunch
    - 5. Extra time opportunity. This is pay for hours worked above and beyond the regular work hours, but not over 40 hours/week.
    - 6. Overtime opportunity. This is pay for hours worked in addition to 40 hours/week. Should be paid at increased hourly rate.
    - 7. Ask staff what perks they would like
- c. Make sure the incentive is not taken for granted. An incentive must be earned or it loses its value.