



For you, your career, and your life

Vol. V No. 1 Resident Assistance Program Newsletter April 2008

Newest Member of the Team? How to Earn Professional Respect

It's your first day working with a new group of people, and you're the rookie. You have earned some pretty impressive credentials but now you are surrounded by physicians who outrank you by several levels, colleagues who have been there awhile, and staff who have seen a lot of doctors come and go. So how do you go about earning the respect of everyone in this new situation?

"When entering any group, particularly at the bottom, the biggest mistake is jumping in with both feet," says Rick Brenner, principal, Chaco Canyon Consulting, Cambridge, Mass. He does extensive work with organizations that depend on teamwork for success. "It's



"We are none of us infallible—
not even the youngest of us."

— W. H. Thompson

better to ease in gently. Listen and watch. You may be called on to contribute, but wait until you're asked. Stepping up and making your presence known is risky, and you will probably end up making mistakes that will harden others' impressions of you right away."

Brenner suggests new group members tread as lightly as they would approach a baby deer in a petting zoo. "You don't just walk right up and put a handful of corn under the deer's mouth — you approach slowly and cautiously so the deer knows you are harmless. That may be difficult for doctors who have achieved a great deal of their success by being bold," he acknowledges.

Are there any instant ways to build rapport with senior group members? Not really, says Brenner. "Your superiors are looking for a pattern of utility, so look for ways to be useful. That actually doesn't take much — it could just be staying out of somebody's way. Being humble is important. If you can find opportunities to

When you work among the best of the best, it's inevitable that some of your most cherished assumptions will be challenged. During residency, it can help to have someone to listen, provide extra support or a fresh perspective. Not just for crisis situations, your Resident Assistance Program is also a resource for coaching and referrals to resources that can help you excel as a physician. Call us at 813-870-3344.

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establish yourself as leader among your peers, that can make you more useful to those higher up."

"Another mistake new members of a group can make is overvaluing what they have to offer," Brenner notes.

"Remember that what you know is less valuable to the team than it is to you. It's unlikely senior members will be looking to you for the latest information on a procedure or condition. What they do want to see is that you demonstrate the ability to learn."

And that's the way to impress, says Brenner. "Make sure you learn what you are supposed to learn. When you show the ability to learn, and learn fast, you send several messages to those instructing you: It's easy to teach you, so they will want to spend more time with you. And since you are learning so well, they must be great teachers!"

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Money Matters

New Upper Limits for IRAs

Beginning in 2008, workers can contribute up to \$5,000 per year to an individual retirement account (IRA), and those aged 50 and older can contribute up to \$6,000.

Although these new limits are the only recent development for the IRA, what's most appealing about the IRA has passed the test of time: It still offers a tremendous opportunity for workers of all ages to use the power of tax deferral in pursuit of their long-term savings goals.

The IRA was created in 1974 with a \$1,500 limit that was raised to \$2,000 in 1982. In 2001, lawmakers approved a series of scheduled incremental increases that culminated in 2008. In 2009 and beyond, the IRA contribution limit will be indexed to inflation.

Over a 30-year period, a worker who contributed \$5,000 per year to an IRA earning a hypothetical 8% annual return could accumulate an additional \$340,000, compared with a worker who contributed just \$2,000 per year. (Actual results will vary, of course.)

Even if you participate in an employer-sponsored retirement plan, you may still be eligible to contribute to a deductible IRA. If you have assets in a former employer's plan, rolling them into an IRA may give you more options and greater control over your money.

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Earning the Respect of the Team, *continued*

Part of successfully integrating into a team and coming across as a professional is to avoid alienating anyone in it. "Everybody notices how you treat the other folks on the team. People at very top may be able to get away with bad behavior, but it can be very expensive to emulate them. Be aware of the people whose work is essential to the entire operation, like secretaries, administrators and custodians. Be humble, respectful and empathetic with everyone, including the people you may be competing with. The relationships you build at this point in your career can be lasting ones."

When you need advice in your new situation, whom should you consult? "When you need professional advice, seek it from your peers or people a notch or two up, but not higher. Otherwise it might be assumed that you are trying to curry favor, so you might harm your reputation unintentionally. If you need information, it's best to get it from people on the staff, not physicians. If you treat staff members with respect, they can become good information sources for you. If you need personal advice, don't ask anyone at work. Things get around. That's when you can use your EAP or other confidential outside resource."

The 1986 film "Top Gun" can teach high-achieving individuals a lot about teamwork and making mistakes, says Brenner. "Watch it and look for the interactions between the 'best of the best' — fighter pilots with excessive confidence and the people training them, who are even better than they are. You can see what happens when a team member alienates his peers, and how the desire to be first has to be restrained for the good of the team. You can also see how the main character recovers from a mistake that shakes his own and his team members' confidence."

It's a given that you will make mistakes in your career, Brenner says. "The biggest danger is failing to recognize your mistakes. Your superiors will try to trip you up, because that's also a part of your education. It's up to you to acknowledge and learn from your mistakes, to accept that your confidence is going to be shaken from time to time, and move forward."

Resources

- Chaco Canyon Consulting www.chacocanyon.com
- "Self-Managed Work Teams in Health Care Organizations," Elizabeth D. Becker-Reems, J-B AHA Press, 1994
- "Team Dynamics: Professional Development Series," Debbie Housel, South-Western Educational Pub., 2001
- "Group Dynamics for Teams," Daniel Levi, Sage Publications, Inc., 2007
- "The Relationship Edge in Business: Connecting with Customers and Colleagues When It Counts," Jerry Acuff, Wiley, 2004