



TEN CARDINAL PERSONNEL RULES

by Duane Johnson PhD

What is a Cardinal Rule? It is a rule that should never be violated. You always adhere to it! Through thirty plus years of health-care business ownership, leadership and management, I have developed and used these ten cardinal personnel rules. They create enhanced camaraderie, increased performance benefits among a sleep service team when consistently followed by physicians, managers and sleep lab owners.

1. Never have an indispensable sleep team employee but treat each one as if they were. Of course, everyone would like to feel

indispensable. But, for a sleep team to function effectively, every job on the team should have a back-up. Preferably someone else on the team should be cross-trained to do another's job or there is an available sleep trained person in the community that can step in temporarily. People do become ill, move on or even no longer perform at acceptable levels and need to be replaced.

2. Every sleep team job needs to have double coverage. This rule is the flip side of the first. Each sleep member's job description should include a requirement to be cross-trained on another team member's job. These assignments should be done to assure that every position is double-covered not only for the reasons already mentioned above but also because of patient overload, such as a very difficult sleep patient situation which often has to be managed on a one on one ratio. Periodically it is good practice to have the backup person take over for a day to keep him/her at a consistent quality care level.

3. Every task in the sleep lab that needs to be done needs to be assigned to a sleep team member, by name, and that person is held accountable. Otherwise a lot of 'that's not my job!' occurs. If we know who is assigned to do it, there is no passing the buck. Any task not completed can be clearly handled when that happens. Also, when a person knows the team is counting on them to perform certain tasks, a sense of importance and meaningfulness drives that sleep team member to consistently perform well. For this reason well written, specific task lists are so important in the job descriptions.

4. Never hire someone you cannot fire. Hiring a friend or a relative normally violates this rule. Employees can be friends but rarely can a friend be an employee. Compromises are often made on performance just to keep the relationship. Or all other team members tip toe around the employee friend/relative because everyone knows that person is an unequal employee.

5. Always praise in public, and constructively criticize in private. One of the quickest ways to de-motivate a sleep team member is to criticize them in front of a



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patient or his/her peers. If correction needs to occur, find a private place and time to communicate without blasting that person's dignity in public. Be sure your management objective is to bring about performance improvement and not just venting a professional or personal anger. Choose constructive words that are carefully devoid of strong emotional impacts. On the other hand, valid praise can do wonders to create higher team performance and mutual respect among the sleep team. Use praise frequently, liberally and honestly.

6. Pay for the job, not the person doing it. A sleep job description can be categorized with a salary level continuum for various regions of the country. The person filling that job is paid within that salary range for their performance of the assigned tasks based on job supply and demand circumstances in that region.

7. Pay for performance, not tenure. Does that mean an employee can outgrow the job? Yes it does. A job description is worth so much in a regional marketplace. A sleep professional performing excellently, after a number of years, can peak out on a salary range with only some inflation-adjusted changes being able to raise the top end of the salary range for them. They must either increase their worth with additional needed skills or stay self-motivated at the peak. Just because a person has been there another year does not validate a salary increase, only improved performance does.

8. Always preserve the dignity of the team member. When speaking with or to your sleep team, be sure not to 'talk down' but 'speak with' them. Encourage, be diplomatic and never in a fit of anger or frustration belittle an employee or sleep team colleague. While being friendly or having a lighter moment, be careful not to offend them with any social, sexual, religious et al overtones. Think before you speak.

9. Ask not what an employee costs but what return on investment they provide. The most valuable asset a sleep lab has is its staff. It also is the largest expense on your financial statement. Invest in continuing education and people skills training for them. Lead the team in building each other up not in competing with each other and tearing each other down.

10. Maintain effective team communication and you will maintain effective relationships. Communication is the grease that makes the team function well without squeaks. Plan effective staff meetings at night so all can attend. Have regular individual meetings such as documented performance upgrade reviews. Schedule fun events/activities or celebrations for the team. Write a monthly employee newsletter or email focusing on a team member and other news.

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