



Understaffed and Overwhelmed

HR Solutions' research has revealed disconcerting results regarding employees' perceptions of staffing at their organization. Our National Normative Database shows that a mere 47 percent of employees responded favorably to the following item: "Enough people are available in my work group to accomplish the necessary workload."

Inadequate staffing is a principal contributor to job-related stress, which is, in turn, a principal factor in turnover. Employees in understaffed organizations can lack a sense of control over their rapidly increasing workload. This hectic environment can lead to poor work performance and can be detrimental to the organization as a whole.

Increases in voluntary termination, workforce downsizing, hiring freezes, and budget take-backs cause many organizations to become understaffed. HR Solutions Inc. found that some employees in the healthcare industry fell below the norm score. Through our data we found that only 45 percent of Registered Nurses that are directly involved with patient care think their departments are adequately staffed. Furthermore, according to the New York State Nurses Association, demanding work environments accompanied by low pay impel many new nurses to leave the New York hospital system as soon as they begin.

Understaffing not only affects its employees, it also has a negative impact on customer/patient care. According to the Direct Care Alliance and Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute, "When healthcare providers are short-staffed and supplement their workforces with temporary help, continuity of care is disrupted and patients are adversely affected."

HR Solutions has made the following recommendations for organizations with growing staffing concerns:

- Communicate and educate the employees on adequate staffing ratios;
- Better management/staffing of vacancies. Make sure that temporary help is properly trained and as competent as normal employees;
- Understand the underlying themes of why employees are leaving or absent. Establish a retention plan (focus on career development, communication, etc.);
- Manage stress levels. Implement new programs for employees, such as a wellness/fitness program. Promote more fun in the workplace by hosting luncheons, themed events, etc.;
- Managers work with Human Resources to ensure the right talent and behaviors are being identified and hired. Use a New Hire Survey to curb the attention of new employees and keep their motivation at a high level.

To further address this issue with our clients, HR Solutions established an alliance with Strategic Systems International. Strategic Systems focuses on Human Capital Optimization for organizations. In our experience with Strategic Systems we have learned the following best practices for optimizing staffing resources:

- Audit departments to determine whether or not they are understaffed;
- Restructure understaffed departments to achieve maximum efficiency;
- Analyze scheduling patterns by looking at the workload per shift to identify peaks and drops in productivity;
- Move employees out of "fixed" positions, and into more flexible positions.;
- Better manage the resources you have. Review daily routines to make sure employees are working smart.

Human Capital Optimization is the process of matching human capital supply with customer demand. This helps organizations in reducing their total staffing costs, improving quality of products and services, increasing efficiency of staff deployment activities, and improving financial and operational predictability. The bottom line is through optimization, your employees will be less stressed, both physically and mentally, and your customers will be more satisfied.