

The Do's (and Don'ts) of Getting your Busy Manager's Attention

As many nurses are aware, managers are extremely busy people with a lot of pressing responsibilities that often keep them away from staff. Rather than write off your manager as a "lost cause for help", it is best to pick and choose which issues to pursue when trying to get their coveted attention. Here's a list of recommendations to help you make the right decision.

1. Get to know your manager's style:

Find out how your manager addresses staff-related issues. Is your manager accessible, meaning can you talk to your manager informally or does your manager generally delegate staff concerns to another role on the team, such as a charge nurse. If so, make it a priority to develop a good relationship with the charge nurse in order to increase your chances of being heard.

2. Decide the most appropriate type of problem or issue to bring to your manager:

First, assess if you can solve a problem on your own or with another team member: if you determine that your problem can be addressed by the team, then it is best not to solicit your manager's help. Save the "big ticket" items for your manager's attention. For example, if you are continuously having a problem with another department that is affecting your ability to deliver care to your patients, then your manager should be alerted and become part of the solution.

3. Timing:

Timing may be key to getting the manager's attention. If you have an issue that deserves attention, but your manager is preoccupied with completing a deadline, such as preparing for JCAHO, your ability to be successful will be minimal at best. Patience is very important; use your 'waiting' time for preparation.

4. Be prepared:

Preparation may be the most important thing you do to maximize your success with your manager. Practice framing your issue so that you present a compelling and credible case: meaning, carefully define the reason a particular issue deserves attention: the specific way it is affecting you, team members and patient care as well.

5. List of possible solutions:

Managers usually like solutions when a problem is presented to them; you may want to record them, in an organized way, and share them with your manager. Without possible solutions as part of your presentation, your problem becomes just another item on their "to do" list. Also, when you are prepared with solutions, your manager is less likely to diminish your concern as just "bitching and moaning".

6. Team roles and responsibilities:

As part of your list of solutions, roles and responsibilities should be included, particularly if the solution involves a specific type of implementation. Prior to meeting with your manager, initiate a discussion with the team about their specific participation. Inquire if team members are willing to take on roles and

responsibilities; if so, then successful implementation will be more likely. Also, be willing to get feedback from the team. Their feedback, both positive and negative, will be instrumental in designing best way to move forward.

7. Don't give up too easily, if you don't get what you want:

If your best efforts to get your manager's attention don't materialize initially, it doesn't mean that you have failed or that you shouldn't have bothered. If your issue is important and deserves your manager's attention, it will not go away. What you may need to do is tweak your strategy and reflect on other ways to get your manager's attention. It may be time to reflect, go back to the drawing board and perhaps modify your request, before you present it a second time.

While spending time creating a strategy to get your busy manager's attention is not something many busy nurses look forward to, it may help improve your team environment and elevate patient care over time. And that result is definitely worth everyone's time, effort and attention.

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