

CASE STUDY

It's been just over a year since Carla decided to stick with her job and she's glad she did. Joining a network turned out to be a positive change for everyone including the employees, doctors, and patients. Switching to electronic medical records was quite a challenge but the benefits are now obvious. Although Carla was nervous about having to learn some new computer skills, she sailed through the training and even helped her coworkers and the doctors complete theirs. With renewed confidence in her ability to learn new things, Carla is seriously considering enrolling in a bachelor's degree program at a local university using the tuition assistance benefit she gained when her employer joined the network.

Now it's time for Carla to undergo her first performance evaluation. She hasn't been late or missed a day of work since she started. She has a positive attitude, submits suggestions for improvement, and always speaks highly of her employer in public. She

complies with policies and rules, accepts responsibility, and holds herself personally accountable for the quality of her work. The doctors and her manager have made lots of positive comments about her performance but Carla realizes she's in the early stages of her career and still has more to learn.

What can Carla do to prepare for her first performance evaluation? How can she find out what criteria will be used and how her performance will be scored? What materials could she gather to demonstrate the quality of her work and the impact she has made during the year? Should she mention that she joined a professional association and attended continuing education seminars every quarter? Should she bring up the fact that she's thinking about returning to school to work on an advanced degree? What would you do to prepare for your performance evaluation if you were in Carla's place?

receive a pay raise at all. When pay is tied to performance, it's even more important to focus on objective criteria rather than subjective criteria in the evaluation process.

Which behaviors result in outstanding evaluations? Keep reading this book because most everything you need to know to earn an outstanding evaluation is covered in these chapters. As you read, start evaluating your own strengths and weaknesses. Think about what you need to improve on and what steps you will take to do so.

When your performance review gets close, take the following steps to prepare:

- Review your job description and make sure you're familiar with the essential functions of your position.
- If your company uses a performance evaluation form, ask for a copy. Make sure you understand the performance criteria and how performance is evaluated and scored.

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It's been almost four months since Carla underwent her first annual performance review. Positive feedback from the doctors and her office manager and coworkers resulted in an outstanding evaluation. Carla received the highest score that the practice has ever given to a new medical assistant with just one year of experience. She received a modest pay raise and spent part of her next paycheck on the textbook that's required for the college course she just enrolled in.

Things were going really well until last week when Carla overheard one of the network's purchasing agents on the telephone with a salesperson from a local computer company. Carla heard the purchasing agent tell the salesperson that she would buy 100 computers for the network if the salesperson would agree to give her husband the same quantity discount for the five new computers he needs for their family-owned grocery.

At first, Carla didn't pay much attention but the more she thought about it, she realized that what the purchasing agent was doing wasn't right. She was using her authority as her company's purchasing agent for her own personal gain and that seemed like a conflict of interest to Carla. Now she can't decide what she should do, if anything. She's still relatively new, really likes her job, and doesn't want to cause trouble but she can't help but wonder what other dishonest acts the purchasing agent might be involved in. If someone finds out that she suspected the purchasing agent of unethical behavior but didn't report it, Carla's afraid that she might get in trouble, too.

What, if anything, should Carla do? Should she mind her own business and remain quiet? Or should she report the matter to a superior, confront the purchasing agent about the conflict of interest, or take some other action? What would you do if you were in Carla's place?

result of cheating, your lack of competence may quickly become obvious and other people may suffer. Your professional reputation will be seriously damaged, perhaps beyond repair. Can you cheat just a little and get away with it? Ask your conscience.

A serious example of dishonest behavior is falsifying information, also known as *fraud*. Fraud is not only dishonest, it's illegal. A few examples of fraud include:

- Misrepresenting your education, credentials, or work experience on a job application, résumé, or other document
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It's been 6 weeks since Carla decided to report what she believed to be a conflict of interest on the part of the network's purchasing agent. And she's glad she did. An investigation uncovered several instances of dishonest behavior and the purchasing agent was fired. The network's director and Carla's practice manager thanked her for being attentive and willing to step up and report the wrongdoing of another employee. They told Carla they really appreciated what she had done to protect the reputation of the company and they said they wished other employees had a similar sense of loyalty and commitment.

Carla isn't sure if there's a connection to this whistle-blowing incident or not but she's just received a special assignment and a pay raise to go with it. She's now assigned to a brand new interdisciplinary team that's been formed to design and open a new clinic across town. Several coworkers have congratulated her and she suspects they're surprised that a relatively new MA could earn such an impressive assignment so quickly. But everyone seems to like Carla and she's been told she has great people skills, so she's happy about the change and looking forward to her new role.

But Carla's enthusiasm took a nosedive at the first team meeting. People were pulled

from several different practices in the network to create the new team, so members were meeting each other for the first time. It became clear quickly that people had a lot of different opinions to share, which didn't surprise Carla. She had worked in health care long enough to know that nurses, medical assistants, physician assistants, office personnel, and doctors would have different perspectives and couldn't be expected to agree on everything, but the first meeting was chaotic. Several people tried to talk at the same time while others remained silent. No one was put in charge, so when three people tried to take the lead, conflict broke out. Some of the team members weren't very polite. They laughed at people's ideas and interrupted when others were trying to speak. One man became aggressive and left the meeting early.

Now Carla is worried. Her job depends on the team's success but some of the members don't seem up to the challenge. What should Carla do? Should she ask to be removed from the team, go back to her old job, and give up her raise? Should she take over leadership of the team and tell people to shape up? Is there something Carla could do to help the team function more effectively? What would you do if you were in Carla's place?

people to push you into doing things or saying things that you would rather not do or say.

There's obviously a lot to think about when communicating with people in person. Let's examine the many pitfalls of communicating with people electronically.

Electronic Communication

In today's highly technologic world, communicating electronically by e-mail, voicemail, texting, cell phone, Internet, telephone, and fax offers several

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Carla was disappointed in how poorly her new team functioned during its first meeting so she found some books and other reference material on group dynamics, meeting facilitation, negotiation, and conflict resolution. When the team met for the second time, she wasn't the only member who voiced concerns about the need to work together more effectively. Carla had read about the concept of group norms and thought it made sense. She suggested that her teammates develop some group norms to serve as guidelines as they moved forward. Other people liked the idea and after about 30 minutes of discussion their "rules" were posted on the conference room wall for everyone to see and follow.

Carla was pleased that people liked her suggestion and relieved that the group was moving along more smoothly now. Several sub-committees had been formed to coordinate a series of projects. Over time, it was becoming apparent that Carla was emerging as a leader of her team. She realized that,

with practice, she was getting pretty good at facilitating the meetings. She made sure that everyone's voice was heard and their opinions were respected. She worked hard to improve her communication skills and develop stronger organizational and time management skills.

Carla's supervisor was very pleased with her performance as were other leaders in the network. As a result, Carla was appointed team leader of the new Patient Experience sub-committee created to figure out what it would take to deliver first-class customer service in the new clinic still under construction. Carla was thrilled and nervous at the same time. In addition to her current job, she had only worked in one other place and that was the small practice where she did her practicum. With only limited patient care experience, she had no idea where to begin in coming up with a plan to provide the best patient care experience of any clinic in town.

What should Carla do? What would you do if you were in Carla's place?

Patients need families and friends to help them through difficult situations. Having clergy present may help. Sadly, not all patients have a support system. Some patients will complete their entire hospital stay with no family or visitors present. These patients need some special compassion and attention from their caregivers. Other patients have large families and lots of friends and sometimes this can cause problems. Policies regarding hospital visiting hours have always been controversial. Some hospitals strictly enforce limited visitation while others have abandoned visitation limitations altogether. The problem is that visitors don't always use common sense. If a person is sufficiently sick or injured to require hospitalization, then he or she needs rest and shouldn't be overtaxed with too many visitors. However, maintaining connections with family and friends is an important part of the healing process. Sometimes it's up to the caregiver to enforce limitations on visitors to carry out the wishes of the patient and what's best for his or her recovery.

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It's been several months since Carla started working with her new team and she's realized that things have really changed with her job. As part of her duties as team leader for the Patient Experience sub-committee, she's been visiting several out-of-town clinics known for their outstanding customer service and high patient satisfaction scores. She's read dozens of articles and reports about customer service in 5-star restaurants and hotels and thought about how their approaches might apply in health care. She's convened two focus groups of patients to ask them what they feel is important when receiving clinic-based services. She's learning far more than she ever expected in such a short period of time. And she's really glad that she still gets to work as a medical assistant about 20 hours a week to maintain her skills and contact with patients.

Carla's role has changed dramatically. She's out in front now, meeting with doctors, conversing with patients, negotiating with vendors, and giving reports at staff meetings. Her hard work has certainly paid off but now she's beginning to wonder if her personal image needs some sprucing up. She isn't used to giving presentations and participating in high-level meetings but she knows she has to look the part. She's beginning to wonder if she should lose some weight, get in better shape, and buy some clothes other than scrubs.

What should Carla do, if anything, to make sure that her appearance and her overall personal image support the success she's experienced in her new role? What, if anything, would you do if you were in Carla's place?

- Exercise, nutrition, weight loss, smoking cessation, and **stress management** classes (the ability to deal with stress and overcome stressful situations)
- Coaching and support provided by wellness counselors

Employers are offering healthier food in their cafeterias and vending machines, setting aside bicycle and walking paths on their campuses, planting gardens to provide fresh produce, and offering employee discounts on memberships at local fitness clubs. All of this is good news for health care workers who recognize the connection between a healthy personal life and a healthy professional life.

Personal Management Skills

Personal management skills (the ability to manage time, personal finances, stress, and change) help you keep your personal life in order and support your success at work. Attendance and punctuality are good examples of how your personal life can affect your job. After all, does it really matter how professional you look or how competent you are if you can't get to work on time and be there when you're supposed to be? Your ability to show up for work on a daily basis and keep your appointments is one important aspect of your job.

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