



Good Management in Nursing



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Activity aids for use in healthcare

For an improved quality of work in nursing

With changes in the population and the rise in the number of elderly people resulting in a rising number of chronically ill and multimorbid individuals, the subject of 'health care' has increased in significance for both the individual and society. This higher level of importance, the new challenges and the rising demands on nursing mean that answers are needed on what form nursing should take in the future. The working conditions in the nursing industry are characterised by elevated physical and mental stress, time pressure, awkward working hours, high numbers of personnel absent through illness and personnel rapidly leaving the profession. These stresses on the personnel also directly affect the quality of the work, thus also affecting those in need of care.

While the challenges in nursing require a solution as part of a larger society and must not be tackled alone, those who practise nursing should and must recognise and take advantage of the organisational freedom they have to overcome current and future challenges.

Following up the holistic approach of the memorandum 'For a new quality of working in health care', the Institute of Work and Technology in Gelsenkirchen has been developing six topics together with its partners as part of the project 'practical guides for nursing'. These fields represent the most significant stresses for employees:

1. Time pressure in nursing, -
2. Leadership, -
3. Communication and interaction, -
4. Compatibility of family life and profession, -
5. Nursing individuals afflicted with dementia, -
6. The debureaucratisation of nursing. -

Together with practitioners from hospitals and both inpatient and outpatient health care facilities, practical guides such as this have been developed to provide incentives and encouragement by allowing an exchange of knowledge for everyday working life, thus contributing to improving working conditions. To create a close connection to and allow for a constant exchange with actual health care practices, the authors alternated during the course of the project between conducting workshops with the support of care facilities and conducting evaluation phases. The process was less about generating new knowledge and much more about transforming theoretical and practical knowledge that was already available into a form more useful for nursing facilities. It was important for everyone involved to look at material and aspects within the thematic fields that had potential for improvement or change on an operational level.

Six practical guides are the result – guides that provide practical recommendations and encouragement for nursing practices, clarify the reasons for doing so, demonstrate the circumstances, show examples of good practice and act as a provider of incentives and ideas, enabling new paths in nursing to be laid and, if needed, to be taken.

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Foreword

“Management makes all the difference” – while that might at first sound like a truism, it holds true without a doubt today, with nursing institutions being no exception. This practical guide is intended to present the current expertise on this subject in a concise and precise manner and also provide sustainable recommendations for use in practice in the face of increasingly unclear and obtuse literature on the subject. The fields covered were selected as part of the INQA Project “Practical Guides for Nursing” together with the participating institutions. We offer our sincerest thanks to the institutions that took part in the develop-

ment of this practical guide by expressing their experiences, providing examples of good practice, offering frank feedback on the articles and contributing a great deal of further valuable information.



1 Professional, personal, successful

Management in nursing

“Management” is not an abstract concept. Managing personnel is all about reaching complex work targets together on the basis of a dynamic relationship between people. As such, the following information on good management practice is very well established. It has been derived from many years of intensive collaboration with a wide range of management personnel from inpatient and outpatient nursing institutions, hospitals and clinics as part of quality development projects, workshops and training sessions and has been corroborated by precise interviews conducted with “successful” management personnel. The question of what makes a successful manager gives rise to a concrete set of skills, which will be expanded upon with a focus on the following core subjects:

1. **-Personnel management skills** understood to be the ability to be both clever and critical about oneself, productive attitudes, principles and ideals.
2. **Action skills** understood to be the ability to be able to make use of all skills, knowledge, results from social interaction, personal values and ideals in a highly determined and active manner.
3. **Professional and methodical skills** understood to be the ability to overcome difficult problems in a creative way with professional and methodical knowledge to hand.
4. **Social and communicative skills** verstanden als die Fähigkeit, sich mit anderen zusaunderstood to be the ability to work together and interact with others, to co-operate in a creative way and communicate with them.

When taken in the context of a nursing institution, the following aspects that define a successful manager can be derived from this model:

Personnel management skills are demonstrated by managers

- - setting priorities in a precise manner and selecting tasks that need to be carried out carefully. Making use of a small number of targets that are of high importance, so as to have something for him or herself to concentrate on and achieve results.
- - having developed a positive attitude when dealing with personnel: “making out the best of ordinary people”.
- - not hiding behind external regulations, rather represent their own, unambiguous position.
- - having developed a consistent, client-oriented attitude and expressing this in a credible manner.
- - appraising the current quality of the current service provided in a realistic fashion (without embellishing it or perceiving the current situation to be perfectly adequate).

Action skills are demonstrated by managers

- -having clear impressions of the direction they want to take and a strong vision based on his or her own principles of the form that the service should take.
- -working actively with fixed, well-thought through targets that are supported by the personnel.
- -“putting the pedal to the metal” (providing resources, creating basic conditions, supporting personnel etc.) when the decision is made that something in particular needs to be done.
- -checking precisely to what extent and with what kind of expenditure and effort externally imposed requirements are to be implemented in the institution. The personnel perceive management to be primarily occupied with the task of creating ideal basic conditions so as to allow the personnel to concentrate on the “core business”.
- -having perseverance in pursuing targets. They do not allow themselves to be demotivated or impeded by resistance or setbacks.
- -checking the effectiveness of changes made.
- -expect, support and demand a good level of performance from the personnel.



- -end the working relationship with personnel if it is clear that the relationship is not working.

Social and communicative skills are demonstrated by managers

- -seeking to actively discuss changes with their colleagues and support them in dealing with changes.
- -checking the appropriateness of their management style by discussing it with personnel and nurturing a open feedback culture.
- -being generally always ready to form open relationships with the personnel founded on continuity.
- -recognising and taking into consideration individual skills and resources that personnel possess.
- -appreciating his or her colleagues in all their diversity.
- -being available for personnel to speak to when they are having problems (not always work-related).
- -not acting as though they were self-important or distancing themselves using the hierarchy.

Specialist and methodological skills are demonstrated by managers

- -being able to realistically recognise the strengths and weakness of their own working environment (ward, group, team).
- -working with concrete, easy-to-understand data and facts.
- -carefully thinking about the tools that they want to use and not being impressed by short-term fads.
- -making intensive use of available tools and actively searching for new fields of application.
- -quantifying goals whenever this is possible and useful.
- -ensuring that responsibility is being taken seriously in a reliable manner and that agreements or tasks are being carried out to the letter.

Practical example: Luisenhospital in Aachen

An interview with senior nurse **Ms. Mauer**

Question: *How do you go about making important decisions?*

Ms. Mauer: As a senior nurse, it is important for me to approach decisions in a structured manner and, whenever it's useful and possible, to gather feedback their application in practice. For example, we recently had a new infusion system introduced. I started by demonstrating the system during the ward management meeting. I then asked the personnel to collect arguments for and against. Next, the personnel were able to discuss the reasons for and against. I avoid getting too involved in discussions such as these, as I would to really find out more about the arguments that the personnel put forward. However, I also find it important to place a limit on discussions, because eventually all of the arguments will have been expressed. Then it's time for the decision.

How do you organise your relationships to your personnel?

I draw a clear line between professional and private relationships. I don't know if this is really necessary, but it helps me to build relationships that have a healthy, professional distance. This might irritate a few of my personnel, but the longer they know me, the easier it is for them to accept this type of relationship or even to appreciate it.

What do you do when you recognise deficits in your personnel?

I find it important to be open and honest in communication. It's particularly when I recognise deficits in an employee's performance that I feel the need to approach them

openly about it. However, I don't do so in an accusing tone, rather I try to create incentives, trigger developments. I have had positive experiences in this respect. This means in the long-term that personnel feel less inhibited to talk about where their knowledge and skills are lacking. It is important that the responsibility for their actions remains with them.

Any manager would wish for personnel that can work as independently as possible and take responsibility for their own actions. What experiences have you gained in this field in your time as a manager?

You can't just throw all of your personnel "into one basket". Good management means having to adjust to individual personnel. Generally speaking, I find it important that the personnel are able to apply their potential so that they can work as independently as possible. If this works, I can move on to the next step and hand over more responsibility. But this also works in the other direction – if it doesn't work, or if personnel are being asked too much of or are unable or unwilling to accept responsibility, I need to take a step back.

What skills should a good manager bring to nursing?

The ability to view things objectively and fairly and to be open-minded about employees' arguments. The ability to avoid allowing yourself to be put under pressure and thus have control over your own emotional state. After all, a manager who lets themselves be put under pressure also allows themselves to be controlled by their emotions. This often leads to them acting recklessly, kicking off too early or just simply "losing their head".

What does "appreciation" mean for you?

I try to approach my personnel with an appreciative attitude. I find it important that I be genuinely interested in the personnel. I don't mean telling private stories here. For me, appreciating personnel means being interested in their potential, seriously listening to their opinions on professional subjects and supporting personnel in their further development. This approach also helps to increase the level of trust, to have personal topics discussed and it also enables us to get to know one another. This is my management style. My experience with this approach has been positive so far.

Do you deal with everything by yourself or are there times where you rely on support from others?

I've learnt to get support through training or advice from colleagues if I'm stuck with a problem. I always need to reflect on things and call in an outside perspective on the way I manage.

Can you tell us another "secret for success"?

Continuity is important. Work with a plan. Have perseverance and implement things that you consider important in a consistent manner. This makes you predictable for personnel. Nothing is worse than constantly having to start things anew and not completing anything. This kind of situation undermines the employees' motivation considerably.



2 Good employment decisions pay dividends

Recognising and recruiting new, valuable personnel -

Ms. Werner is a manager in an old peoples' home and is seeking a qualified nurse. An advertisement placed in local newspapers and magazines leads to an influx of applications. Three applicants largely meet the requirements and are invited to an interview. Ms. Werner sets 45 minutes aside for each interview. Once the interviews are complete, Ms. Werner decides upon one applicant – Ms. Engel. She gives the impression of being very open-minded and friendly. There are a few issues that need to be cleared up, but Ms. Werner is happy that Ms. Engel is available at such short notice. It wouldn't be the first time for her that an applicant has suddenly decided that they don't want the position. This means that the problems with the personnel rota are solved for now. Any other issues will be tackled during the trial period. During the trial period, it turns out that Ms. Engel demonstrates considerable deficiencies in her nursing planning and is unable to organise her work sufficiently well. Ms. Werner is surprised. She hadn't expected this. The provision of support also fails to bring success as she had hoped. Ms. Engel's contract is terminated at the end of the trial period. This means that the primary nurse position is vacant once again.

This example is not an isolated case. That positions in nursing are not filled by appropriate personnel is something that occurs repeatedly. It is more important to make informed decisions related to personnel with a view upon the current situation and the possible continued development of the institution.

Poor decisions in selecting personnel have direct and negative effects on the well-being of the patients and residents, the quality of cooperation in the team and cost time and money.

What you should know

The selection process should be structured in such a way that allows the suitability of the applicants to be assessed in a reliable fashion. Poor decisions in selecting personnel have direct and negative effects on the well-being of the patients and residents, the quality of cooperation in the team and cost time and money. Interviews conducted in a spontaneous fashion or an “unmistakable” impression of people are not usually sufficient for making decisions in selecting personnel that are sustainable in the long term. The core element of most selection procedures is a traditional-style interview with the applicant. During this interview, it is important to avoid using popular but clichéd questions (“What do you think are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?”) and concentrate more on gaining a more specific perspective of the applicant's potential.

How you can go about this

- Create a profile that clearly defines the requirements of the position to be filled! It should not only contain professional requirements (knowledge of expert standards, ability to plan nursing etc.) but also desired fundamental skills not specific to the profession (such as communication skills, teamwork skills, client focus etc.). It's only on this kind of basis that informed decisions can be made.
- Concentrate on a small number of requirements that are critical to success!
- Define, for example, what you exactly mean when you say "communication skills"! What makes a good communicator in nursing?

Example: "Communication skills"

- Is open-minded and sympathetic towards others, but retains a certain distance
 - Retains a positive and controlled demeanour in all situations throughout the day – even in difficult and conflict-ridden situations
 - Is able to create and expand upon contacts quickly
 - Exhibits appreciation of those he or she is speaking to
 - Is a good listener and is responsive towards those he or she is speaking to
- Make sure you have a fixed standard for evaluating the selection process! It is not enough to make decisions based on details of skills that may or may not be available as mentioned in the written application.

- Use the applicant interview to assess the skills! You can create a vague outline of the interview. This outline should contain questions that allow the skills to be assessed to "come to the forefront"! These questions allow you to ask the applicant to talk about situations they have been in, where, for example, communication skills were demanded, and to describe their own behaviour or approach. You can derive the questions directly from the definitions that you have produced yourself!

A few examples of questions for determining skills

Communication skills:

"Tell me about a situation where you were clearly able to listen well and respond well to the person you were speaking to!"

"Tell me about discussion you had with a person you found rather unpleasant. How did you act personally when talking to this person?"

Willingness to learn:

"Tell me about something you did that was new for you, that really challenged you and forced you to learn something new!"

"Each of us has had situations in their career that haven't not gone so well. Tell me about a situation that you've had like this. What did you learn from it?"

Questions like these allow you to "drill" the applicant – meant positively, of course. They allow you to precisely evaluate the level of experience that the applicant possesses. It will also become clear very quickly to what extent the person being asked has actually experienced situations such as these and their approach in overcoming them. Make detailed notes during the interviews about the answers that each applicant gives and assess them in a methodical and systematic fashion! An evaluation scale will help you during the assessment process:

The evaluation scale (1–7) contains assessment criteria that allow the answers to be assessed.

(1) = unconvincing

- - the way described that the situation was overcome contradicts how we would expect it to be
- - the application has demonstrated hardly any apparent skills with regards to the requirements

(4) = well expressed with potential for development

- - the way described that the situation was overcome fits how we would expect it to be
- - the applicant demonstrates good performance, but experience in handling difficult situations is missing

(7) = excellently expressed

- - the applicant possesses skills that are extremely well-developed and have been well-tested in practice

An overall assessment provides a summary of all of the individual evaluations, gathered from the various questions related to the applicant's skills. This allows a skill profile to be produced for each applicant and enables comparison. In turn, this allows for selection decisions to be made based on solid information. However, the selection process does not necessarily have to be based solely on an interview.

Practical example

Johanniter-Stift Gelsenkirchen

Johanniter-Stift Gelsenkirchen has introduced a three-stage selection process. After the interview (stage 1), selected applicants spend a whole day in the institutions and are assigned a concrete task, e.g. to produce a nursing plan for one resident within the institution. Seeing the applicant actually in action shows clearly whether he or she would be able to complete such a complex task using their professional and personal skills.

During the observation period, the applicants are supported by management personnel from the nursing team and are observed on how well they match the requirement profile. Once the observation period is over, the results from the interview and the observation period are evaluated among the management personnel involved and compared. A final discussion (stage 3) allows the results to be discussed with the applicants. The procedure used by Johanniter-Stift that integrates an interview and practical test is worth the extra effort involved. It allows poor decisions regarding personnel to be considerably reduced. New personnel now hardly ever leave the institution after the trial period. Even if deficits in skills and gaps in knowledge do become apparent, necessary development measures can be integrated quickly into the induction plan, adapted precisely to each new recruit.



3 Making a good start

Successfully organising the induction of new management personnel -

In nursing, the assignment of a new manager often fails within a year. The negative repercussions for all involved are difficult to avoid – the institution has to refill the position, the self-confidence and possibly career prospects of the failed manager are dented and personnel become insecure. An example: the home management team spoke of a “breath of fresh air” during an interview that they hoped the new living area manager, Ms. Horten, would provide. A number of “veteran” living area managers were not up-to-date with modern nursing. As such, Ms. Horten started out with a great deal of enthusiasm and drive and was looking to implement new concepts quickly. She was certain that the home directors would support her every step of the way. Four months along the line, and she’s just about to throw in the towel. The reason – she was far too quick to concentrate on everything that could be done differently. The other living area managers felt as though they were being placed under pressure by this and that the work they were doing was being devalued. The personnel within her living area began with high expectations of their new manager. The somewhat neglected living area would finally be seen in a more positive light. However, they too felt somewhat devalued by the sheer speed of the changes. As Ms. Horten also made two obvious mistakes, they also began to lose trust in her. Ms. Horten’s working day became ever more difficult.

She felt increasingly isolated. The home directors were also becoming increasingly withdrawn in their support

for her. Ms. Horten felt as though she was being treated unfairly and regretted changing position. She asked what kind of perspectives she had. This is a story of a change of position “gone wrong”. An isolated case? Certainly not!



What you should know

Why do so many changes in management fail in nursing?
They fail because

- Institutions still equate “clearly exhibited professionalism” with “ability to manage” when filling management positions internally. This means that management positions are filled internally by the best qualified nurse.
- When filling management positions internally, institutions are usually happy to find someone who will actually take “the job”. They usually neglect to check that requirements are fulfilled.
- Institutions often do not engage in career planning or talent management and are thus only able to react on a short-term basis when filling management positions that have become vacant.
- Institutions rely too heavily on satisfying formal requirements. The new living area manager is considered to be suitable because he or she has completed a qualification as a living area manager.
- The new manager does not possess the required skills and abilities needed to work successfully. The institution making the decision has “sensed” that there are deficits in the applicant selection procedure but has not actively discussed them. These deficits become visible during the first few months or weeks, but cannot be compensated for in the short term by providing supervision or training.
- Superiors do not clearly express their expectations. It is silently assumed that the new manager will “figure out what it’s all about”. On the other side of the fence, new managers often neglect to find out about the expectations of their superiors, colleagues and personnel. They don’t do this, because they are afraid of appearing insecure and would rather “roll up their sleeves and get on with it”.
- The new manager does not have sufficient background knowledge of the reasons why the change was made or does not take these reasons into consideration. An example: Ms. Miller was employed as the new senior nurse in an inpatient nursing institution, so as to en-

able the poor quality of the nursing to be improved. She wastes no time in having necessary changes introduced. However – the three measures with the highest priority had already been suggested by the living area manager working under the previous senior nurse but was simply unable to have them accepted. Ms. Miller is successful in a short period of time and takes the credit for the success. The living area managers tag along. Nonetheless, they see “mixed feelings” of hope, competition and the realisation of their own past failures develop.

How you can go about this (as an institution)

- - Make an active effort to support your new managers!

Example: Sozialholding Mülheim

Sozialholding Mülheim supports several inpatient nursing institutions and one outpatient nursing institution. As part of an effort to develop the service provided, new management structures were introduced. Management positions that had been made vacant or just created were to be filled internally as far as was possible. To clarify whether personnel from the institution were ready and willing to accept the responsibility of management, interested personnel were invited to a briefing session. There was a surprisingly large response. To begin with, the institution management provided information on other planned developments and the opportunities that arose from these developments to assume management positions in nursing. The personnel were then given the opportunity to give short presentations on problems presented in advance to demonstrate their own knowledge and experience. The style of the presentation allowed early hints to be given on the management potential available internally.

- - Proceed carefully when (re)filling management positions. Create a detailed profile demonstrating expected

qualities related to the position and a profile detailing absolute requirements focused on the applicant!

- - Explain what is expected to the new manager! Take the specific basic conditions into consideration that the new manager will encounter! Remember to bring the management style of the outgoing ward management into the discussion during the selection process.
- - Let the new manager know what you expect and find out the extent to which the manager can and wants to fulfil these expectations!
- - Ensure that the new manager is carefully supported during the induction process!

How you can go about this (as a new manager)

- - Speak to your superiors, fellow managers, personnel etc. and make sure you are aware of their expectations. This doesn't mean that you should create tasks for personnel to perform that are carbon copies of these expectations, rather it should provide you with information on the perspectives that your actions will be viewed from. Remember to take the (supposed) unexpressed expectations into consideration!
- - Identify key persons and form relationships actively and appropriately. Key persons may be, for example, predecessors that may have provisionally taken on management duties during the transitional process. Show an interest in their experience! How does your predecessor assess the situation? What does he/she see as important for the work?
- - Proceed carefully when taking on the management of "problem children" – groups or teams frequently making mistakes, where complaints or negative incidents dominate or where the personnel turnover is particularly high. This is sometimes the case. There is a considerable danger in groups such as these of being practically "ground down" between high expectations on one side and high levels of frustration on the other.
- - Think before you act! Give yourself time and find out about current issues within the institution, group or

team! Get a picture of the situation for yourself before getting started! Use different sources and perspectives, for example external inspection reports or the results of audits or employee/client surveys. Study the facts at hand!

- - Find out about the strengths and resources that you can build upon and make use of them! Which processes run particularly well and smoothly? Which strengths and skills do the personnel have? Who works with whom and do these collaborations provide good results? Which innovations have been successfully implemented in the last few years?

Proceeding systematically allows you to create the necessary conditions to create a coherent "programme" that



will satisfy superiors, personnel and other groups involved and provides a good start to long-term management success. A programme like this should:

- be adapted to the unique conditions in each institution. This makes it credible and boosts confidence.
- be ambitious and set challenging goals. This makes it motivating and provides a clear direction. It's teams that produce "poor results" that particularly expect a coherent programme that make it possible to "get things really moving forward".
- make it clear that it will preserve fundamental achievements made in the past. This shows a level of appreciation and respect. So – don't just say what you want to change. Remember to also say what you really want to keep and why.

Special case – internal assignments

Ms. Werner was a nurse on a surgery ward for many years. After the former ward manager left the position, she took over the management. Since then, everything has been very different. She feels very insecure and unfa-

miliar among her new ward management colleagues. Her relationship to her former colleagues has also changed. Ms. Werner quickly begins to miss the relaxed and natural style of interaction. Furthermore – her former colleagues behave differently. Discussions in the office sometimes come to a pause whenever she enters. She also has mixed feelings about humorous comments made such as "Should we call you Ms. Werner now?" Somehow she feels like an outsider.

What you should know

At first glance, the switch from the team to superior position seems simple and comfortable. The "internal climber" knows the personnel, procedures and peculiarities of the institution. However, the fact this switch is often demanding and prone to problems is often not viewed with enough importance. Nursing teams often form a culture whereby equality and mutual solidarity dominate and differences in rank are of less importance or completely ignored. If one of the team members switches to the role of a superior, the difference in rank can no longer be denied.



The task of the new superior is now to enact the change in hierarchy in the form of a new behavioural and communicative style. This is not a unique activity. “Internal climbers” often speak of isolation in their new role.

How you can support new managers coming from the team when switching to their new position

- - Explain what the switch to the management position is all about!
- - Have faith in the ability of the new manager to make the switch under his or her own steam!
- - Assume that the switch will take time and recognise that irritations and “mini-crises” are bound to crop up once in a while!
- - In cases such as these, don’t begin to doubt the ability of your new manager to manage!
- - Observe the hierarchy from the very beginning! This means that you should never go over the new manager’s head, even if you need to speak to team members regarding what appear to be minor issues!

How you can make the switch as a new manager

- - Make sure that you are aware that the familiarity and feeling of belonging as you have always known it will be gone once you switch position!
- - Give your team time to get to know you in the new position!
- - Give yourself time to decide how to settle into the new position! Don’t overburden yourself! Beliefs such as “a good manager needs to have everything under control from day one” are more discouraging than encouraging.
- - Create distance to your team step by step without descending into ridiculous, bossy behaviour.
- - Make an active effort to feel like you belong among managers of the same rank! Talk about your experiences on this level with each other!
- - Let your team know you want to work together with them in your position as manager!

Practice example

Successful development of new management personnel: Hohenhonnef GmbH

Hohenhonnef GmbH supports institutions that specialise in care for the disabled and has pledged to offer its own personnel interesting career opportunities. For example, personnel with management potential are given particular duties, are trained to become internal experts on particular subjects or have the opportunity to assume certain management duties (moderating working groups, meetings etc.) This kind of approach allows personnel to learn to perceive activities from new perspectives beyond the team level and trains them to organise processes as appropriate. This makes switching to a formal management position easier.



4 Learning to praise performance

Appreciation is motivation!

Many nursing structures and services are only able to work because personnel are fully committed and often apply more effort than is actually demanded of them. It's fully understandable that they would like this additional commitment to be clearly recognised. However, giving active praise is not at all as easy as it first sounds. Most managers recognise that praise and recognition must be as reserved, "authentic" and substantial so as to avoid descending to ridiculous rituals. It is clear, however that not everyone can make their own laudable intentions reality and give personnel recognition that they can perceive.

What you should know

Praise and recognition are more than just being nice. The fact that recognition and praise themselves have an influence is often overseen, and they are often conspicuous by their absence.

1. -There is ample evidence to show that a lack of recognition together with a high readiness on the part of the employee to invest a great deal of energy in the work present a real risk to health.
2. Results of fairness tests show that personnel feeling that they are being treated fairly perform better, get involved more actively, identify better with the institution and develop more trust in it than personnel that feel as though they are being treated unfairly. Personnel feel as though they are being treated "fairly" if they perceive the relationship of "giving" (e.g. working, performance, commitment) and "receiving" (e.g. wages, status,

recognition) as being balanced. If the institution is fair and generous in their treatment of its personnel, the personnel will behave in the same way. For example, personnel will voluntarily take on unpleasant tasks and will be ready to put up with short-term personal strains, challenges and difficulties. A few examples:

- Personnel do overtime and help to overcome staffing bottlenecks arising from sickness leave
- An employee is ready to learn about doing a new task
- An employee is ready to tackle their own behavioural deficits and participate in an appropriate training course
- -an employee with poor knowledge of English, for example, who has so far not expressed herself in team discussions, expresses her readiness to prepare to give some professional input during the next meeting.

On the other hand, unfair treatment leads to personnel attempting to recreate the lost balance, for example, by "reducing" their level of commitment to an "appropriate level". Many managers do not perceive these links or underestimate the subject for various reasons:

- They set such high standards for the work and behaviour of the personnel that they apparently do not find any opportunity to give praise – after all, most of the personnel act below the standard demanded.
- They are of the opinion that personnel are fulfilling the duties established in their contracts and receive an appropriate wage for it. "Why should I praise someone for something that I'm justified in expected from them?"

- they see outstanding performance by personnel, but do not give praise, because they are already mentally one step ahead.
- They have acknowledged personnel for good performance. The personnel have not reacted as the manager wanted or expected. Instead of joy and gratitude, the praise is simply met with a silent acceptance. Insecurity or disappointment on the part of the manager can be the result of a misunderstanding like this.
- They suspect praise and recognition to generally be a form of manipulation and don't want to walk down this path. "Whenever I was praised by my own superior, I knew that they wanted something from me!". As such, they just pass on praise completely.
- They view praise and recognition in terms of fairness of distribution. If I praise A for something he did, then I also have to praise B for something that he did too, or else I'm not being fair. This creates expectations – jealousy and distrust are the result. So they prefer to leave it altogether.
- They actually can't find the time to acknowledge personnel for good performance, because "problem cases" are taking so much of their time. They're happy that all of the others are not "causing any trouble" and don't need their attention.
- They're of the opinion that praise and recognition have no place in modern nursing. Independent personnel that want to make use of their potential in their work and actively take control of their own development do not need praise or recognition.
- Similarly, they're of the opinion that an employee in need of praise and recognition is a sign of poor maturity. Really mature people do not need this kind of confirmation from others.
- Give praise right away when you notice something praiseworthy! Putting it off will lead to you forgetting it! Giving praise immediately and directly allows you to make use of your current emotional presence! Perhaps you've just had "a load taken off your shoulders" as your employee expresses his or her willingness to carry out an important (and unpleasant) job? Your praise is more convincing when it is expressed from your own relief or even enthusiasm. If you put off the praise until the next meeting, it's often not as in-keeping with the mood!
- You should only ever criticise in private, but you can give praise any time you want!
- Be specific in your praise! Pre-fab praise ("great job!") doesn't make much of an impression!
- Express your praise personally! Assigned praise doesn't work!
- Avoid all forms of "manipulative adulation"! If you expect something from an employee, discuss it openly!
- Make sure that you are aware that you are not alone in the way you make use of praise. You're building the foundations for a culture of mutual recognition!

How you can go about this

- Recognition and praise must be carried out in an informed and individual manner. Turn your full attention actively towards the employee. During our daily routine, it is often not easy to observe personnel as attentively as it is to observe data, figures, vital signs, current problems etc.

Practical example

Appreciation – recognition – encouragement: Christinenstift in Nideggen (Eifel)

1. Everyone is important

Personnel are shown in clear and easy-to-understand terms how important, valuable and essential their contribution is to the work of the institution. Personnel are also informed extensively about current developments. This affects observations from nursing consultations as well as the consequences of excellent nursing care on long-term human resource policy. This open and participatory policy of information allows personnel to recognise the link between their own efforts and the results achieved.



2. Feedback counts

Observations of the nursing made as part of nursing rounds are shared and evaluated in discussions intended for reflection and encouragement. The employee finds out for him or herself through the expressed appreciation that his or her own work is being observed and that their superiors are taking the time to do this. This not only encourages professional improvements but also improves the relationship between personnel and managers. In the long-term, it also encourages personnel to get “their” feedback on a regular basis.

3. Encourage interest and enthusiasm

Whenever personnel overcome difficult situations or show stamina, they are given small rewards. But it’s not about the material value of these bonuses. Their power arises from the fact that their superiors are showing that they recognise their performance and that they can appreciate and recognise the value and contribution of the employee.

4. Strengthen teamwork

The nursing teams are well-versed in openly discussing individual “strengths” and “weaknesses” with one another. During an intensive team development process, the nursing teams learned how to tackle and solve problems and conflicts independently. Since then, they have also been able to observe each other’s performance weaknesses and mistakes or the risks of making mistakes are discussed openly within the team.

5. Always guarantee equipment that help ease the work

Nursing trolleys for all resident groups were procured after the personnel suggested it – there is one document box per resident group and there is the possibility of making detailed notes at the trolley. A bumbag with pens, telephone, medication cabinet keys if necessary ensures that all personnel have all of the necessary materials ready to hand.



5 The right word at the right time

Constructive criticism

Especially for managers looking to adopt a cooperative management style, criticism discussions are a complex subject. Many managers go out of their way to avoid critical discussions and confrontations with their personnel. They are afraid that they will react negatively, push the blame onto someone else, react angrily or only appear superficially to accept the criticism. They are also often worried about the general working climate in the institution. Nonetheless, deficits in the way work is done or inappropriate behaviour can be disruptive to work processes, which can make working together difficult or even have negative repercussions for residents and patients. This makes criticism discussions a management task that cannot be delegated to someone else.

What you should know

Critical discussions with personnel hide a number of pitfalls. Critical discussions gone wrong can actually cause long-term problems within the working environment and the relationships between those involved. Conducting critical discussions involves a delicate balancing act. On the one hand, personnel need to be confronted clearly and openly with points of criticism. On the other, the employee being criticised must always be treated with due tact, respect and politeness. It is easy to lose this balance in either direction. In one extreme case, an open discussion can turn into a merciless and direct attack, which can af-

fect the employee and offend them. At the other extreme, approaching an employee tactfully with a eye firmly on the possible effects of the discussion on the discussion partner can turn into ambiguous, evasive “beating around the bush”, which only serves to confuse the employee and leaves them unclear as to what to do.



The doors of change only ever open from inside. Offended people lock these doors.

How you can go about this

When preparing a critical discussion

- - Keep in mind that expressing criticism is part of responsible management and that it is part of your everyday job. This helps you remember that the situation doesn't always have to be at breaking point before you are forced to express criticism.
- - Make sure you know your intentions behind wanting to conduct the critical discussion. Do you want to make them aware of mistakes and agree upon ways that the employee can avoid these mistakes in the future? Or are you just trying to show "who's the boss here"? This kind of "self-evaluation" before the discussion is something you should never pass on.

When conducting the critical discussion

- If your discussion is aimed at "jolting" the employee with your criticism and triggering off a learning process, then you should do everything you can to strengthen the motivational effect of the criticism and leave out anything that might weaken it! After all, the doors of change only ever open from inside. Offended people lock these doors.
- - Take personal responsibility for the criticism! Expressing criticism is risky, as it is possible that the employee will be offended by your criticism, especially if the points of criticism are closely related to the self-esteem of the employee. Do not make references to other individuals or anonymous entities!
 - - Criticise specific behaviour, not the person as a whole! People being criticised for the way they are feel injured and occupy themselves with retaining or restoring their personal integrity.

- Concentrate on the most fundamental issues and set focuses! Generalised statements only serve to demotivate. It's only in healthy doses that criticism can be moulded into something positive.
- Avoid irrelevant generalisations such as “always”, “never”, “all” etc. People accused of “always” avoiding conflicts will either become resigned and non-responsive or remember at least one situation where they did manage to deal with a conflict. In either case, the examination is not constructive in nature.
- Be precise and specific in your arguments! What precisely did you observe? In which situations did the problematic behaviour occur? What were the consequences for the objective results of the collaboration?
- Never criticise personnel in front of the entire team! This embarrasses the employee. The employee will then generally not try to deal with the criticism at hand, but will occupy him or herself with the question of how he or she can compensate for the loss of face in respect to the team.
- Do not represent interpretations as facts! “You’re not at all interested in learning IT skills. All you want is your peace and quiet!”
- Remain calm, objective and polite! A sharp tone of voice, a sense of acrimony, impolite overbearing and abusive remarks either cause the employee to adopt a strong defensive stance or lead to obedience or subservience out of fear. Nothing is learned from either case.





6 Managing conversations

Successfully structuring discussions -

Team discussions, departmental conferences, cross-department discussions – this is a familiar routine for managers and nursing staff. The daily routine of the discussion rounds should, however, not hide the fact that: 1. This discussion is important for assigning tasks that need to be carried out, sorting out problems, determining work focuses etc. 2. Communication in the nursing team can appear to be awkward and sometimes even troublesome, if for example there are difficulties that remain unexpressed among personnel or if there are even “gang wars”. This kind of situation can cause entire teams to descend into a resigned inflexibility. In this case, even the best discussion moderator will be put severely to the test. Seen from this perspective, discussions are an accurate reflection of the culture within the institution, but discussions also have great potential in influencing this culture. Personnel often complain of unproductive discussions with endless talk and few results. They might feel like they are just there for the sake of it, and let the time pass with the feeling that they are having to nod in agreement to decisions already made elsewhere. Discussions should thus be structured in such a way that quality results can be achieved within the time given with the involvement of a high number of the personnel. This enables them to play a considerable role in the success of the institution and encourage employee commitment and satisfaction.

Personnel often complain of unproductive discussions with endless talk and few results.

The personnel taking part can indeed influence more in a positive fashion than previously thought. Nonetheless, the quality of a discussion is in no small measure dependent on the type of discussion management. These days, there is a wide variety of literature on the subject of “discussion management”. Implementing suggestions into the daily routine is not always easy – but it’s always worth thinking about the available potential for improvement.

What you should know

1. -It seems to be obvious. Seating arrangements negatively affecting communication, missing or defective media, disruptions by ringing mobile phones or participants being called out are anything but conducive to constructive and productive discussions – nonetheless, they are still part of everyday discussions in many institutions. Does this sound familiar? The discussion has just begun. The first agenda point is being discussed. Then Ms. Miller is called out “because of an urgent issue”. It’s impossible to discuss this point properly without Ms. Miller. Time passes. There are still three important topics to discuss. As Ms. Miller comes back, ten minutes have passed. The team tries hard to pick up where they left. Or they just pick up their ringing mobile, with participants accepting calls “because there’s no way around it, unfortunately, because it’s really important”. Or the new flip chart – without any paper. Or the nice new discussion room. Sadly, the tables are arranged in such a way that six participants are sitting next to each other and can’t see each other. Exceptions to the rule? This all happens more often than you’d think.
2. There’s hardly enough time for discussions to cover everything needed. Discussions are often “crammed” with topics to be discussed, so that it is clear from the outset that there is no way that everything can be discussed. At the end of the discussion, everyone is frustrated because “yet again, we haven’t managed to cover a lot of what we wanted.”
3. -The subject is specified. It is actively discussed. It isn’t possible to recognise a main central theme. The discussion is going “all over the map”. It was actually supposed to be about the new infusion device. As the discussion leader brings the group “back to the subject”, half the time for the discussion has already passed. There is no result in sight.

How you can go about this

Before the discussion

- - Make sure you know which subjects need to be covered to what extent and in which form. Is it perhaps possible to bring the subject over in another, simpler way? Perhaps a circular would suffice? Or a note about new information in the handbook?
- - Agree upon a few fundamental “discussion rules” and ensure that these rules are consistently adhered to in practice!
- - Define precise discussion goals in advance as far as is possible! These goals should be reached, visualised and finally agreed upon with the participants by the end of the discussion at the latest.

Examples of discussion goals

By the end of the discussion...

- - we will have decided whether we want to carry out an internal training course on “basal stimulation”.
 - - we will have developed ideas on how we can use the nursing rounds more intensively to provide specific feedback for the personnel.
 - - we will have developed ideas on how we can use the nursing rounds more intensively to provide specific feedback for the personnel.
 - - we will have gained feedback from the team (approval, worries, open questions) on the planned introduction of the new infusion therapy.
 - - we will have established which personnel shall be switching to the newly-opened living area.
- - all personnel will have been informed of the new nursing guidelines that they have to consider.
 - - As soon as the discussion goals are clear, it will be possible to create a sustainable time plan for the subjects in need of discussion. For example, this makes all the difference whether you want to begin by establishing

the general feeling of the personnel on a sensitive subject or reach a decision right away. The decision process will generally need to be discussed at more length and so you will also need more time.

- The discussion goals demonstrate whether you as a manager act generally speaking in a systematic and well-thought through manner. Acting systematically means that you spread certain subjects across several discussions with the team. For example, you would begin by evaluating the general impression of the team of a new procedure, then gather suggestions for changes and finally plan the decision and implement it.
- Discussion goals are also excellently suited to controlling the discussion process. If the goal consists of developing ideas, you can interrupt heated arguments, whereby ideas are being attacked and defended, firmly and persuasively by reminding everyone of the goal.
- Set the order of the subjects according to their importance! The subject of particular importance should be at the top!

- Check whether you can get your personnel involved by having them provide brief input on the subject!
- Ensure that the participants have the most important documents to hand during the discussion!
- Always avoid triggering open discussions on a subject when you have already made a decision on the subject in private! This only serves to dent the trust people have in you and your credibility.

After the discussion

- Keep to the agreements made at all times! Be a role model and carry out the duties that you have personally taken on in a reliable manner! Keep promises that you have made!
- Make sure that personnel are also keeping to agreements and keeping their promises! If personnel are not keeping to their agreed duties, you must not simply let it pass or gloss over it! Otherwise, all you are doing is contributing to the establishment of a culture of “consequencelessness” – “whether we do something or don’t do something, it doesn’t matter – nobody will notice anyway!”





7 Recognising potential, developing skills

The employee development interview -

The employee development discussion is among the most important instruments in management and personnel development. The primary goal of this instrument is to agree upon and evaluate steps with regards to support and development for each employee. The employee development discussion is carried out regularly (usually once a year) in private between the nursing manager and one of the personnel.

What you should know

The nursing environment has changed in recent years just as much as the people that work there. The professional demands in nursing professions are constantly rising. This particularly affects the ability to structure relationships with residents, patients and relatives so that they are productive. A responsible working style, independent organisation and a willingness to work together are also essential key skills. The fundamental attitudes and values of nursing also change over time. The desire for personal development, good career perspectives and high expectations for an attractive working environment affect them as do the motives of carrying out useful work for other people and having job security.

Viewing nursing institutions as “learning organisations” reveals that there is a need to define the basic organisational conditions as well as changes and developments together with the personnel, which means finding ways for both sides to benefit. It is only possible to secure long-

term performance and service provision for institutions from personnel if this is made an urgent and ongoing task. However, subjects of more overriding importance, such as

- - regular feedback on individual performance,
 - - applying and making use of skills and abilities constructively within the institution.
 - - Discussing performance and skill deficits, triggering development processes for the individual and providing support in their implementation
- rapidly descend to being an “aside” in the process of routine communication.

The employee development interview can be viewed as a “time out” from daily business and allow the manager and employee to leave the playing field to view the ongoing and future goings-on together from the stands. The enclosed nature of the one-on-one interview makes quality communication possible, which can lead to a deeper mutual understanding. Managers often see employee discussions as an unpleasant task. They feel internal resistance towards speaking openly with the employee about work performance, strengths and weaknesses or towards exposing themselves to the open feedback provided by the employee on the manager’s management style. Personnel too sometimes fail to see the opportunities that they are provided with. They are aware that their relationship to their superior is affected by the hierarchy and is thus not

on equal terms. This can lead to personnel feeling inhibited in talking about things openly or expressing opinions to the contrary. They “adapt” their behaviour or act “strategically” and are actively involved in “impression management”, whereby they try hard to present themselves and their performance in a positive light.

How you can go about this

Turn the employee development interview into a successful management tool that takes centre stage in your management.



1. - Let the employee know what the development interview is all about, what it will involve and what the goals are.
2. - Prepare each individual discussion carefully. Look back over the time that has passed. Take a look at the agreements made during the development interview and evaluate how far they are in their implementation.
3. - Allow for enough time in carrying out the discussions.
4. - Ensure that you can carry out the discussion without any kind of disruption from outside.
5. - Clearly justify your assessment of the employee's work, performance etc. Get to the point and avoid beating around the bush.
6. - Make sure the conversation runs both ways. If the conversation is intended to bring about a change in the employee's behaviour, it is important that he or she is also able to express his or her own impressions and feelings in detail. Listen attentively and be responsive to the arguments and questions that the employee puts across.
7. - When expressing criticism, always do so in healthy doses and link it with offers of support. Too much criticism is discouraging.
8. - Concentrate on and limit yourself to the employee's working behaviour. The personality of the employee is a taboo subject.

9. - Conduct discussions as openly as possible. This means avoiding manipulative behaviour so as to avoid damaging the relationship of trust.
10. Make notes on the agreements made.
11. -Be reliable in keeping the promises you have made during the discussion.
12. Use the results and agreements achieved during the discussion to enhance your general management. This brings this tool to life and prevents it ending up as an "isolated one-off discussion"!

Possible basis questions for the employee development interview

Look back at the past work period

- What is the focus of the tasks that the employee has performed up until now?
- Are fields of responsibility and duties clearly defined?
- Which support or training programmes has the employee taken part in? Which of these programmes have had a positive effect on the daily routine and which ones haven't?
- How satisfied are you with the performance, the way the employee has completed tasks up until now? What was positive, what was negative? What went well? What didn't go so well?
- What qualifications, skills, abilities does the employee have that he or she is not using or only using to a limited capacity?

Looking to the future

- Work goals: what goals should the employee be looking to achieve in the near future?
- Personal development goals: what personal development goals is the employee looking to pursue?
- Skill development (future working time): which skills need to be further developed (strengths) or developed (development fields) in order for the employee to be able to achieve good results in reaching his or her work and personal development goals?
- Which support programmes should the employee participate in?

Feedback for the managers

The employee development interview is not a one-way street. Ask the employee for feedback on the management style! Ask if information has been brought over well, if meetings have been conducted well and, in both cases, how well. It is also possible to ask about the quality of job delegation, decisiveness as well as involvement in decisions. Other possible subjects to discuss may be how monitoring is carried out, feedback on performance and behaviour, personnel support etc.

Evaluating and assessing during the development interview

The quality of feedback during an employee development interview is largely dependent on the careful definition of the underlying criteria used for assessment purposes. In this way, superficial judgements and misunderstandings can be avoided. Both the criteria (resilience, teamwork skills, willingness to cooperate etc.) and the scale should be clearly defined:

Resilience (1 – 7)						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
demonstrated to an (too) low extent		demonstrated to a good extent				demonstrated to an (too) high extent
– Strengths and skills present can no longer be brought to bear under social, mental or physical stress, even in the short-term.		– Possesses organisation skills in the event of disagreements, difficulties, resistance and under stress for a manageable period of time. – Adheres to original plans under complicated conditions such as these. – Feels challenged and enlivened by elevated demands. – Is able to recognise, express and actively “counteract” own limits (e.g. by requesting assistance). – Use his or her behaviour to encourage others to face difficult situations and accept these difficulties as challenges for the benefit of personal, group or departmental development.				– Adheres to unrealistic plans – Takes long-term stresses upon colleagues and personnel for granted – Applies disproportionate amounts of energy at the cost of his or her own mental or physical health

Here the skills to be assessed are specified in terms of how they are demonstrated to a too low, good or excessive/too high extent. The manager and employee undertake evaluations independently from each other while preparing for the employee development interview (self-assessment and assessment of the other). This highly detailed operationalisation allow the two to understand what the other is referring to.

Agreement of support and development measures

Allow the list of possible development measures below to serve as some inspiration:

1. Measures in the workplace	Goals
– Instructions/feedback from superiors, experts, qualified colleagues	– Expand professional knowledge – Reflect upon and develop behaviour
– Delegation of specific tasks, extending duties – Participation in projects, project management	– Experience in completing tasks independently – Experience in project work or project management – Develop teamwork skills – Expand horizons
– Participation/collaboration in cross-departmental working groups	– Expand knowledge in practical situations – Develop problem-solving skills – Develop teamwork skills
– Participation/collaboration in quality circles	– Develop an awareness for working processes – Continue to develop the quality of the work – Learn to work independently in a team – Learn to provide long-term solutions for complex tasks
– Taking on (to a limited extent) management duties (e.g. heading discussions)	– Learn about the management situation – Expand horizons
– Acting as a speaking during internal seminars etc.	– Develop didactic skills – Enhance knowledge of a specialist field – Expand on communication skills – Develop presentational skills
2. Measures outside of the workplace	Goals
– Stays in other institutions, with other supporting organisations, in other fields	– Talk about experiences – Expand horizons – Find out about new practices and methods
– Colleagues consulting (interview) outside of the employee's own institution	– Develop problem-solving skills – Reflect on the employee's own role/own behaviour
– Visits to seminars, tutorials, course	– Gain and expand upon knowledge – Learn in terms of behaviour – Learn by discussing with other participants
– Participation in external working groups	– Expand upon specialist knowledge – Expand horizons – Strengthen the sense of identification with the institution – Represent the institution



8 To err is human

Guidelines for a culture of handling mistakes productively -

Nursing (whichever form of organisation is used) is fundamentally influenced by the security, health and well-being of the people that place their trust in it. Mistakes in this respect can lead to (severe) harm to people. It is nonetheless clear that mistakes in a complex working environment (hospitals, nursing homes) cannot be avoided.

There is no such thing as a zero-defect system.

What you should know

DIN EN ISO defines a mistake quite simply as being “the failure to fulfil a requirement”. Error management considers mistakes to be “unintentional, undesired actions that may or may not be carried out consciously or unconsciously.” This differentiates mistakes from intentional deviations from norms (such as sabotage). In general, the following rules apply:

- - There is no such thing as a zero-defect system.
- - Each and every person is a permanent potential source of danger for his or her environment.
- - Mistakes generally do not occur suddenly but are the result of a chain of events and consequences.

Human error in health care

P. Deitinger and Chr. Nardella (Istituto Superiore Prevenzione e Sicurezza sul Lavoro) have developed some important information on the causes of mistakes and error probability as part of a scientific study.

According to the study, mistakes arising from forgetfulness or a lack of care are typical of personnel having already achieved a high working routine and carrying out a wide variety of “skill-based” activities. This situation can contribute to mistakes in execution (i.e. incorrect manual implementation despite appropriate intentions). Mistakes arising from insufficient planning (knowledge mistakes) are highly likely to be made by personnel with low work experience. For mistakes affecting the adherence to or application of regulations (rule mistakes), however, it has been determined that the relationship to the employee’s experience corresponds to a bell curve. In this case, the probability of a mistake grows as work experience increases during the first phase, before it begins to decrease again.

- Modern error management demonstrates its qualities by
- making it possible to learn from mistakes made and thus reducing the probability of future repetitions of this mistake as far as is possible.
 - taking all necessary measures to prevent mistakes being made.

Exclusively following a “zero-defect principle” can result in damaging “mistake loops”. For example, a particularly demanding set of guidelines can lead to the discrepancy between expectation and reality being demonstrated in mistakes not being tolerated. Personnel making mistakes are made accountable. In the event of an error, people try to play the blame game. Consequently, personnel make more of an effort to embellish their own acts, cover up mistakes or deny them. Those bringing good news and reporting success are the ones receiving the recognition.

The buck is constantly being passed around and the team atmosphere is damaged. If personnel break silence and report problems, they are quickly seen as being as a “traitor”. This means that mistakes aren’t learned from, which, in turn, makes it more likely that they will be repeated. Near-misses are also not discussed or talked about. This prevents useful error prevention measures from taking effect and new mistakes are made. The personnel become worried – their work increasingly focuses on avoiding mistakes. The will and courage to try out new things diminishes, because trying something new means venturing into the “unsafe zone”. In the long-term, this causes the institution’s ability to innovate to suffer. An external quality audit reveals the deficits present in the institution. The managers feel deceived and are determined to keep a closer eye on things. A culture of distrust results. A proper “error management culture” is the result of a balance



between error tolerance and error prevention. “Error tolerance” is defined by a tolerant attitude towards mistakes whereby understanding and a ready to assist are expressed if something does not work, if mistakes are made or problems are discovered. This does not mean taking mistakes for granted as something unimportant. Mistakes should continue to be avoided and everything possible is done to ensure that they are discovered or mitigated in some way. However, when they occur, they should not lead to sanctions being issued, rather to a willingness to help and provide support on the part of managers, colleagues and/or other groups. Nursing personnel reporting their own personal inadequacies, mistakes or problems to the whole team or group are not lectured or sanctioned, rather they are triggering a support mechanism.

Wie Sie vorgehen können

1. - Make it clear to your personnel how you want to go about dealing with mistakes, how you want them to be corrected, how you act yourself under these circumstances and what you expect from your personnel!
2. - Show them that you would prefer that people learn from their mistakes rather than have a situation where nobody does anything wrong because nobody is doing anything.
3. - Support your personnel in analysing mistakes and help them to take appropriate action. This helps you to ensure that personnel improve their self-assessment skills and have more control over themselves. Learning from mistakes increases self-awareness and the ability to have more control over oneself.
4. - Learning from mistakes is only possible if mistakes and near-misses are discussed openly. Reward personnel that talk openly about mistakes! Nobody likes to talk about mistakes or near-misses. For this reason, you should conduct discussions so that personnel feel rewarded for their openness! After all, it always takes effort and courage to discuss one's own mistakes openly.
5. - Encourage a culture in which open communication and mutual validation are possible. Personnel should be given the opportunity to give and receive real feedback in real time and not be shy about expressing criticism towards managers.
6. - Ensure that personnel are checking precisely whether what you are saying matches what they are doing. Show-off speeches about “productive error management cultures” will be exposed if they have little to do with what the employee is doing.
7. - Carry out an evaluation of the mistake and do not seek to place blame.
8. - Be consistent in directing your efforts at avoiding future mistakes instead of assigning blame!
9. - Make sure you are aware of the difference between responsibility and blame. Let the employee making the mistake take the responsibility but don't start assigning blame!
10. Admit to your own mistakes!



9 Management task: Laying off employees

Structuring and carrying out discussions where personnel are to be released in a fair manner -

Regardless of the reason for releasing an employee – being released from a job is usually a personal catastrophe for the employee in question. Their personal plans are thrown into question, a lack of (material) security arises, their position among their circle of friends is thrown into disarray, important relationships to work colleagues may be cut off etc. Releasing someone also expresses a clear “no” – the message that someone is no longer needed. These are facts that managers are generally also aware of when having to inform someone that their contract is being terminated. So it's no wonder that most would rather avoid this management task like the plague. This makes it all the more important to prepare appropriately for eventualities during the discussion at hand.

Give the employee the opportunity to express his or her feelings. Stay within emotional reach of your employee.

What you should know

Generally speaking, the news that an employee is to be released triggers strong emotions within the employee. The level of self-esteem often sinks dramatically. Many institutions give little consideration to the subject of “releasing personnel”. One reason for this is that the process is considered to be an unpleasant duty that should be just over and done with. Another is that the scope of the long-term consequences of a contract termination are not recognised. As such, these discussions are often insufficiently planned and result in unprofessional behaviour: managers attempt to delegate the task to someone from the human resources department; managers may indeed inform the employee in question personally, but refuse to take responsibility for the decision, instead pre-

ferring to hide behind the decisions and judgements of others. They “beat around the bush” or avoid getting into discussions with the employee being released, as they are suffering from their own feelings of guilt. Managers might use this discussion to really “get down to brass tacks”, leading to the employee unnecessarily becoming all the more offended by the way the termination is being brought over. The termination process is then not only considered to be unfair and offensive by the person affected. Even if terminations are an exceptional incident and are not part of daily routine, they should be prepared in systematic fashion. Preparing well for terminations does not just take the person leaving into consideration, but also those remaining and those that will be joining the institution.



How you can go about this

Preparation

- - Prepare the termination discussion carefully. Check precisely whether your legal obligations are being adhered to.
- - Explain the reasons for releasing the employee so that he or she can really understand them.
- - Make sure that you do not select expressions that attack the employee personally or his/her self-esteem.
- - Select a suitable location for issuing the termination (your own office, discussion room etc.)
- - Take the affected employee's possible reactions into consideration. Is there a danger that the employee may react in an emotional, uncontrolled manner? Or is it more likely that the employee will remain silent in acknowledging the message?
- - Make sure you are ready for any emotional reactions on the part of the employee. Make sure you are aware that reactions like these "are perfectly OK" in this discussion. Avoid lecturing or moralising!

The discussion

- - Call the reason for the discussion "ending the contract"! Avoid small talk, talking about niceties or meaningless issues.
- - Bring the message across early on. Make the message clear that you are ending the working relationship!
- - Justify your decision in clear and succinct terms!
- - Give your employee the opportunity to present his or her point of view without getting into endless discussions or regurgitating arguments that have long been resolved.
- - Give the employee the opportunity to express his or her feelings. Stay within emotional reach of your employee. Show the employee that you can fully understand his or her reaction. Do not confuse being emotionally within reach with "getting soft".
- - Have no doubt in the fact that your decision is final.
- - Avoid making concessions that you know you cannot or don't want to keep!
- - Depending on the reaction of the employee (crying, anger, screaming etc.) offer to postpone the discussion for a while.



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Imprint

Good management in nursing

Specialist advisors and editors:
Stephan Schwarzwälder, BAuA Dresden

Initiative “Healthy Care” of the New Quality of Work Initiative (INQA)
c/o Bundesanstalt für Arbeitsschutz und Arbeitsmedizin, Dresden
Proschhübelstraße 8 01099 Dresden
Telefon +49 351 5639-5443 Fax +49 351 5639-5210 gesundpflegen@baua.bund.de www.inqa-pflege.de



Agency of the “Initiative Neue Qualität der Arbeit” (“New Quality of Work Initiative”)
Nöldnerstraße 40–42 10317 Berlin
Telefon +49 30 51548-4000 Fax +49 30 51548-4743 inqa@baua.bund.de www.inqa.de



Publisher:
Bundesanstalt für Arbeitsschutz und Arbeitsmedizin
Friedrich-Henkel-Weg 1-25 44149 Dortmund
Telefon +49 231 9071-0 Fax +49 231 9071-2454 poststelle@baua.bund.de www.baua.de

Authors:
Jochen Schneider
Konkret Consult Ruhr, Gelsenkirchen www.kcr-net.de

Text editing: KonText – Oster&Fiedler, Hattingen
Design: Rainer Midlaszewski, Bochum
Photo: FOX-Fotoagentur – Uwe Völkner, Lindlar/Köln
Photo pages 24, 25 und 34: Dirk Kerkmann, Oberhausen
Production and printing: DruckVerlag Kettler, Bönen

This brochure has been produced in the INQA-project: “Handlungshilfen für die Pflegepraxis”. Project management:
Christa Schalk and Christoph Bräutigam, Institut für Arbeit und Technik, Gelsenkirchen

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1st edition
Berlin/Dresden 2009
ISBN: 978-3-88261-

