

BY K. RICHARD DOUGLAS

GET A GRIP

SECRETS TO SUCCESSFUL
JOB RETENTION

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WHAT ADVICE WOULD A SAGE OLD BIOMED GIVE TO A ROOKIE regarding the value they bring to their job? A lot is learned after years of practical experience, in both serving customers and maintaining equipment.

What variables exist within biomed or clinical engineering departments that affect job retention? Is there a direct connection between handling more tasks in house and keeping your job? Where are the better opportunities and total package values, the ISO or hospital CE department? Is certification an absolute necessity? What about IT skills?

This month, *TechNation* asks the experts: What will be most important to hiring managers for a new generation of biomed professionals?

TIPS FOR FINDING A JOB

Todd Rogers, a recruiter for TriMedx and a *TechNation* Career Center columnist, offers up these five suggestions for job candidates:

1. Understand what makes you stand out: “Write down a list of the 10 things you’ve done in your career that are exceptional. Take those 10 things and re-write them in a short narrative format so they are written exactly the same way they would sound if you were to tell them to someone else in an interview. Rehearse them.”
2. Keep your resume up to date, even if you’re not job hunting: “Buy and read a book on resumes – write and rewrite your resume before you decide to start

looking for a new job, or before you are forced to look for a new job.”

3. Practice conversation skills: “Conduct mock interviews – many of them. Interviewing is mostly a performance art. Many times the job is given to the best interviewer – which isn’t always the best person for the job.”
4. Hold your head high: “Practice positive self-esteem exercises. Job-hunting can be stressful and sometimes it can be down right depressing. A tough economy can make it seem almost unbearable. The mind plays tricks on the job seeker. You must learn how to manage through all of the negative self-chatter.”
5. Focus on specifics: “When asked about skills and abilities in biomed, never tell an interviewer, ‘I can pretty much fix just about anything.’ That answer is just plain unacceptable. Try this instead: ‘Lately I’ve been working on a lot of pumps – particularly on (brand name). I’ve also spent a lot of time on (fill in with specific things you’ve been fixing). There are a lot of other things I’ve worked on but those are the first things that come to mind.’”

Most experts agree that preparation is key to success. First, you must be prepared internally: Clearly identifying your goals from the beginning will show both you and your interviewer that you are pointed in the right direction. Next, you must understand external factors affecting your search. Researching the job market and clearly understanding the skills required can help a biomed

professional – or anyone else seeking employment. Shadowing someone in the business can offer some insight into what is expected.

Packaging is also important. Consider the lengths that product merchandising experts and marketing departments go to in order to make their product stand out on crowded store shelves. They want to make sure that the consumer sees something special in their product. The same goes for a job candidate.

Everything from your cover letter and resume to your appearance and follow-up says something about you, the product. In a crowded field of interviewees, that well-thought-out packaging can separate you from the rest of the candidates.

After a job is secured, the positive image must continue in order for you to retain your new position and thrive in it. Continued efforts to educate yourself and learn new skills are crucial to bringing value to your new employer.

STICKING AROUND

Tim Hopkins, Executive Recruiter and Operations Vice President at Stephens International Recruiting, says it's important for biomed to keep up with changing technology through continuing education, "especially in networking and the new health care IT requirements if they want to pursue a hands-on career path. AAMI certification (CBET, CRES, and CLES) will also add value to the organization and the employee. If the BMET would like to pursue a career in management, they need to work towards a bachelor's degree, preferably in business and finance," he says.

Hopkins also addresses the importance of good customer service skills. "I would also suggest BMETs become more visible in the hospital by making more

rounds, interacting more with the C suite staff and serving on committees." Don't assume all hospital staff already know the value of the biomed department, he says. "The biomed need to be known as the experts within the hospital when it comes to clinical equipment."

Hopkins says communication skills are also key. "Work towards becoming a great communicator, verbally as well as written. If communicating is not your strong suit, enroll in speech and writing classes at a local community college. Always work on improving yourself no matter what path you take in your career."

THE VALUE OF INTERACTION

Dave Francoeur, CBET, Vice President of Operations at Crest Services and chair of the U.S. Certification Commission, says people skills are at the top of his list when hiring a new biomed. According to Francoeur, there are several advantages to working at an ISO.

"Typically, you will find that an outsourced service provider will pay or provide a little higher-end benefits than an in-house program because most of them are a for-profit organization and they can afford to compensate people a little more," he says.

He says there may be more opportunities for continuing education at an ISO. "For an outsourced solution, the budget for training is not usually the first thing to get cut. With the in-house program, it is, so people don't have an opportunity to grow and develop."

A larger organization also naturally provides more room for advancement, Francoeur says. "In regards to advancement, if you are within a one-shop hospital, and let's say there are 10 or 12 people in the shop, the only way you are typically going to advance is if somebody leaves

for whatever reason. That doesn't happen that often, so your opportunity for growth is diminished tremendously," he says. "If you work for an ISO, there may even be an opportunity where you can live in the same community, but work for another hospital or be more of a traveling service person without having to travel great distances and get an opportunity for developing growth."

Francoeur's opinion on job retention and success revolves around certain soft skills. He points out that the ability to diplomatically explain to a clinician that the problem with a piece of equipment may be in how it is being used is a key skill that is sometimes overlooked.

"When I went to school 30 years ago, it was important that you had a lot of mechanical and electrical skills so that you could troubleshoot things," he says. "That is not so necessary today. First of all, things don't fail nearly as often; secondly, everything is solid state. So what ends up happening is that the real troubleshooting skills that a clinical engineer or biomed needs today are really people skills."

Whether you work for a hospital or an ISO, "It's important that you know how to conduct yourself in a hospital setting," he says. "Negotiation and communication skills are the biggest things right now that bring the most value."

"An extroverted biomed looks at your shoes instead of his own," he says.

RETENTION FROM AN IN-HOUSE PERSPECTIVE

Bill Carroll, CBET, Manager of Clinical Engineering at Aurora Health Care, agrees that people skills are of great importance. "Probably 60 percent to 70 percent of what the biomed does is more fix the customer or user than fix the equipment," he says. "You have be

able to communicate well, you have to be a good listener and you have to tailor your responses to the situation and the individual you are dealing with. Those are invaluable skills for every level of this career field.”

A biomed must also be adaptive, he says. “You need the ability to learn new things. This is an ever-changing career field that presents new challenges on a daily basis: new physicians, new equipment, new technology, new uses for existing technology and new regulations,” he says. “The days of being the super-technician who works on two or three pieces of equipment only, and sort of works in a vacuum, are gone.”

“Unless you are working for an OEM or you’re working in a depot situation, you have to interface with that user just to figure out what’s wrong with the equipment, or in fact, if there is actually anything wrong with the equipment. Is there an application issue? Is it user knowledge? And if it is, you have to be able to explain it in a way that they will not only understand but will accept,” he says. “Those are some major challenges for everyone in our field.”

Carroll says salaries for biomed at OEMs, ISOs and in hospitals are mostly on par, with the exception of ISOs that are in small markets working on more basic instrumentation versus those working on MRI or CT, because of the required skill set. “The complexity of the equipment and the skill set that comes with that complexity drive salaries,” he says. “Larger hospitals and larger corporations typically have better benefits – it’s the way of the world,” Carroll says.

But there are other advantages that come with working at an in-house shop, Carroll says. Primarily, it’s the lack of travel. “If you’re working for an ISO,

the possibility of you working in a single facility for more than three to five years is probably slight. It’s just the nature of the beast. If they have a vendor providing service now, there’s going to be another vendor who is going to come along and undercut that price. When the contract goes away, you go away unless you get hired by the new vendor or the hospital puts you on their payroll and lets the vendor manage you.”

“So that’s one of the advantages of job security if you are working in-house for the organization. If you get cut, it’s your fault; it’s that plain and simple. Yes, economics will come into play, but if you are providing value to the customers and the organization and you are holding your costs as low as possible, if you get cut, then that means that you were the worst of the players on your team or the least valuable,” he says.

Carroll says that while certification is not of primary importance, if two biomed with equal skills were being considered for a position, certification could tilt the decision in the direction of the certified candidate. Carroll points out that most new biomed have more formal higher education than they did several years ago. Other caregivers are required to have any number of certifications, so by extension, the expectation is a consideration for biomed, he explains.

A LESSON FOR NEW BIOMEDS

When evaluating a biomed, or whether to keep a biomed on staff, Carroll asks these questions first: “Have they taken ownership of the service event, of the customer? Did they run it like they care or did they just come to work to get a paycheck? Do they step up? Do they present ideas, good, bad or different? Do they think outside the box? Do they look

for ways to improve what we are doing [to] make it cheaper, make it faster, make it better?”

If the answer is yes, that employee is hired, or retained, no questions asked. “Those are the stars. Those are the people you are going to keep around because you don’t have to tell them what to do every day,” he says. “They know what needs to be done. They go looking for ways to improve things, and they go talk to the customers. If they don’t have anything broken right they go to the departments that they know have the biggest problems and they look for things that are bad and try to fix them. It’s that ownership: Yes, I’m part of the team and I’m going to do everything in my power to make it better for the team which in turn makes it better for yourself.” 🌟

PAYSCALE COMPARISONS: HOURLY RATE RANGE FOR BIOMEDS

According to data from www.payscale.com, the range of hourly rates is fairly consistent across OEMs, ISOs and hospitals, though the average hourly earning potential for in-house biomed is greater and benefits may vary. The site lists these ranges for biomed working at the following organizations:

