

Emergency in the ER: When Traveling and Permanent Nurses Collide

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Like many healthcare providers, Shepherd's Grace Hospital struggles to appropriately staff their Emergency Room. Electing to follow employment trends, the hospital has engaged with a staffing agency for four traveling nurses. The purpose of this case is to explore the challenges of bringing contingent workers into an organization and how these short-term employees are viewed by the others more permanently embedded in the organization and the community. Also of importance is how social and psychological capital develop within an organization and how these roles can conflict when translated into a leadership role. This case follows four days of events for a traveling nurse, a traditional nurse, the Director of Nursing Services, the Director of Human Resources at the fictional Shepherd's Grace Hospital in the real city of Little Rock, AR. Upon conclusion, readers are asked to analyze the actions of these four characters along with the interactions of their circumstances (personal, professional, and geographic) to make decisions for how the hospital should move forward.

BACKGROUND

Temporary or day laborers have been used for centuries. Historically, employment carried with it no guarantee of continuance and workers, who were not in some type of indentured or forced service, had no expectation of any type of job stability. This changed in the late eighteenth century with the legal interpretations of British Judge William Blackstone, who offered that unless otherwise stated at the beginning of employment, one could expect that positions should last for one year (Blackstone, 1893). These interpretations were later used to create the idea of “employment at will” where in both parties agreed at the onset that either could terminate the contract of employment at any time (Summers, 1983). Today, the idea of at-will employment is seen as the counterpoint for right-to-work employment, in which employees have the ability to leave a position “at-will” but employers can also end the worker’s employment at any time without reason or notice, under legal regulations. These legal regulations, which are meant to protect employees from unlawful termination, have been credited for the pronounced rise (an estimated 15%) that was seen in contingent workers during the mid to late twentieth century (Miles, 2000).

The modern view of contingency in the United States can be found in the mid-nineteenth century where a shortage of labor within the mining and railroad industries sparked the creation of a contract labor system designed to attract cheap labor, primarily from immigrants (Clouatre, 2020). By definition, a contingent worker is one who does not have an “implicit or explicit contract for ongoing employment” (“Contingent”, 2018). Contingent workers can be subdivided into three categories: 1) temporary help, those sent by an agency to fill a temporary need; 2) direct hire, those hired in house to fill seasonal or occasional work, and 3) independent contractors, those hired by an organization to complete a specific task (Bauer, Truxillo, Mansfield, & Erdogan, 2012). Today, it is estimated that 20% of the American workforce is contingent, with that number expected to rise to 50% by 2030 (Noguchi, 2018).

For Contingent Workers

Benefits

While the nature of many jobs might seem a natural fit to contingency design, the rise in the number of contingency positions indicates potential benefits to those using their skills in such capacity. For the contingent worker comes primarily the ability to choose how and when they will work (Independent Contractors, 2020). Women, especially those with specialized skills, benefit from contingent situations in that they have more control over their working conditions and work/life balance

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