

My new job is overwhelming: How do I handle it?

Question: "I was offered a promotion seven months ago to a newly created position with new responsibilities and a salary increase. Originally, five people did the job, and now it is just me. One area is very fast-paced and involves registering patients and answering a constantly ringing telephone with people wanting appointments. The second area involves faxing patient documents. The third area involves detailed billing responsibilities. I can accomplish all three roles, but I'm not doing it efficiently. I recently received a good evaluation and another salary increase.

I feel overwhelmed and that I am never completely done. I have spoken to my supervisor about the magnitude of the job. The response was 'I understand and I will see what I can do.' How should I handle this? Should I move on? Am I not giving myself enough time?" — *LEW in crisis*

Comments

Hello LEW in crisis:

I am in currently in your shoes. A good sense of humor will help you through that feeling of never really being caught up. The other part that may help is documenting the time you spend on your individual tasks. I was recently told to support another vice president in our company as well as the current vice president, manager, and their direct reports. Talk about split personality . . . Anyway, I started charting how much time I spent doing what. It is tedious, but it is worth it. Your manager will be able to take that information to their respective boss and human resources to justify another staff person. Good luck!

Posted by: Diane Johnson-Hung | January 18, 2008 at 02:17 PM

I have a similar situation. A full time job in one location and another job at another location with the same company. You are doing a great job in communicating with your supervisor. Has your supervisor followed up? Maybe it's time to see what your supervisor can actually do.

It's also a wonderful idea to document the time spent. When you know how much time is spent in each area, other alternatives can be researched.

Some alternatives are hiring a full time or part time employees, outsource, and/or you working longer hours, or maybe some work does not need to be done. As far as the extra hours, it would be best for you to decide you want the extra hours and then get approval from your supervisor.

Posted by: Anon | January 18, 2008 at 02:58 PM

I agree with both Diane and Anon that documenting your time will help, not only in talking with your supervisor but letting you know where you need to make changes. However, I think you need to give yourself more time to be familiar with your position. I've found in most jobs that it takes at least a year to feel really comfortable in your position. If after a year (which will only be five more months) you still feel changes need to be made then go to you supervisor again and present your information on time spent. I would also suggest that you present your supervisor with a plan for correcting the problem.

Posted by: Courtney L | January 18, 2008 at 03:21 PM

Have a response prepared for the first time anyone asks how they can help, or what needs to be done to become more efficient, like, "we need to hire a temp or part-time employee to answer the phone and send faxes."

This could also be useful during job evaluation reviews. I usually keep a running list on my computer desktop of everything I do as a part of my job for my year-end evaluation. A day or two ahead of time I print it out and rehearse!

Posted by: Lshar | January 18, 2008 at 04:08 PM

As others have pointed out, documenting time spent is always the first step in documenting the need for more help. Another thing you might try is to allocate specific blocks of time for your faxing and billing activities. This will allow you to focus on them and feel a sense of completion rather than a state of constant interruption. Is there a period of the day when patient load or phone calls is lower? That may be the best time to handle the billing.

Posted by: Bernie | January 18, 2008 at 06:57 PM

All of the comments are good. However, I would ask the "powers that be" why they think that only 1 person (you) is expected to do the job previously done by 5 people. Are you getting 5 times the salary and 5 times the benefits? Of course you will get good performance reviews and a good salary increase: your company doesn't have to pay 5 people anymore. Definitely document and chart everything you do, not only for performance evaluations but for your own sanity, so you will realize exactly how much work you do. Then, look at your chart and make a determination about when to "batch" your billing and "batch" your Faxes. You can also determine whether there is some work that does not need to be done by somebody else in the office or not done at all. Just because a task has always been done in the past does not mean that it needs to be done in the present or the future. Another possibility is to have another person in your office help with the Faxes, the billing tasks or phone relief.

Posted by: Anon | January 22, 2008 at 10:57 AM

How about suggesting hiring a high school student to help with faxing and other duties that don't require a great deal of knowledge and experience?

We work with the local high schools in our area and get a new person each year to help with filing, faxing, copying, and other duties. Since it's a part time temporary position, no benefits are paid. This saves our agency money and saves the assistants' sanity as well!

Posted by: Karen | January 22, 2008 at 01:06 PM

I agree with what some of the others have said. First, I would take a week and document your time, so that you can see how much time each area takes. Then, I would talk to your supervisor and see if you can group the tasks into blocks (save up your faxes and do them twice a day; have a specific time that you work on billing without interruption; etc.) to become more efficient. If someone could cover the phones for you while you are doing the other tasks, you will be much more efficient and organized (and certainly be able to concentrate better!).

I just don't see how you can deal with the phones, people standing in front of you waiting to make appointments, and do all of the other things without some help. You would be constantly interrupted by patients (by phone and in person) and would never be able to get anything done efficiently. It sounds like your boss is your ally already - have her observe how often you're interrupted, and see if you can work on a plan together.

Posted by: Lisa | January 22, 2008 at 02:39 PM

I'm not trying to be contrary or anything, but how can LEW take the time to document his/her time when there's not even enough time to get all the work done?

Posted by: | January 22, 2008 at 05:00 PM

Hiring a high school student sounds like a good idea; however, working in a medical environment, there may be confidentiality issues, and use of a teenager might be inappropriate. I would suggest hiring a retiree to do faxing, copying, etc. Retirees would welcome an opportunity to get out of the house and earn some extra money. They wouldn't need to have paid benefits either; many of them already have them. Also, older people usually have better work habits and are more reliable than teenagers. Just a thought!

Posted by: Anon | January 24, 2008 at 05:51 PM

Yes, the documentation is crucial to getting any help. Even if it means sitting down at home to document, it will help LEW's case.

Posted by: Anon | January 25, 2008 at 01:53 PM

In my last job, we had to impress on those we served that one admin split three ways breaks down to 2 hours per person in a 7.5 hour day. You can subtract one hour per day for interruptions, like answering the phone, answering your boss's "walk up" interruptions and the occasional bathroom break. Subtract 30 minutes a day for those 10-minute meetings you spend in meetings with your direct reports to leave you with exactly 2 hours per day. Now if they decide they can live with that level of support, knowing that you will do your best to get what they need when they need, you also have to discuss those times when the split is not even each day. Who will be willing to wait for their work? In the end, it was better to find another job since my last company was not willing to wait "it all has to get done" and "I have to have this today" was theme every day. Now I am much happier and I have much less stress.

Posted by: KarenD | January 25, 2008 at 02:10 PM

Lew, being in the position you are in seems the norm these days, especially with organizations trying to save money. Please realize that because you are taking on the jobs of others, that you may never get caught up - It's the reality of working at a busy place - Let it go and focus on what has to be done now until your employer realizes they are asking for a lot from one person. You will eventually get a rhythm for the job and that negative energy can be redirected to the job. When you get that overwhelmed and helpless feeling, take a bathroom break when possible and try to clear your mind of negative thoughts because trying to work with eye twitches only adds to the frustration. It's hard to be efficient in anything at this point because quite a lot is expected of you. Do what you can and don't push yourself to the point of hating where you are at. Unfortunately, any changes will have to begin with you showing your supervisor what needs to change and why. Best to you and hopefully your situation will improve soon.

Posted by: Anita T. | January 25, 2008 at 02:30 PM

Do you have a local technical college or university that offers a medical assistant program? If you could convince your employer to offer an internship to a student, you gain the extra help you need and the student gains job experience. In the meantime, I agree with Anon, determine which tasks can be eliminated and try to streamline and batch the remaining processes. Believe me, things will get easier as you become more comfortable with your new job. I was in the same situation 8 years ago, and I'm glad I decided to stick it out.

Posted by: Cindy | January 25, 2008 at 02:43 PM

We use university and college interns to help fulfill our obligations to our participants. Our intern volunteers have been a unique advantage to our organization. They bring new and wonderful ideas. And they put resources in place for future interns.

Posted by: Pamela Barnes | January 29, 2008 at 10:06 AM

Hiring a temp is wonderful. My daughter worked in a medical office her junior year of high school, she is very polished, professional and reliable. One of her teachers recommended her for the job. It was a great opportunity for her, she worked from 3:30-5:00 and did all the office faxing. The women in the office loved her. Her job skills were honed, she was treated as an "adult". When I applied for a job at the main campus of the healthcare facility, I actually used her as a reference. I now work as an Executive Assistant to the Chief Nursing Officer. So, hiring a temp, either from a local high school or college benefits all involved.

Posted by: Anon in MO | January 30, 2008 at 04:53 PM

One thing not mentioned is how your office is set up. Can the fax be moved to your desk area? That way when you have a break from the telephones, you can send a fax without getting out of your seat. Can faxes be sent electronically from your computer? Check into software options. This could save you a few minutes getting up and down (and running back to answer phones--do you have a headset?). Good luck!

Posted by: Barb | February 01, 2008 at 03:22 PM

LEW, when you accepted the position and salary were you aware of the required responsibilities? Did you receive a job description? If yes, then look it over and see if you can group some duties as secondary.

My front office people would organize secondary duties (faxing, copying, filing and mailing) to a time in the office that is slower. Have several IN bins: one for faxing (attach a sticky note of what to do with each document prior to placing it in the bin); one for copying (again use sticky notes of what to do and where to send it); and then have an accordion folder in either alpha or numeric order (to file by name or by pt number) for you to place those "faxed" and/or originals you copied to be filed later.

It is also permissible to let the calls for appointments go into voice mail and answer them for 10 minutes every hour on the hour.

Billing should be done before the patient leaves the office and set the next appointment at that time (ringing phone will go to VM).

Filing from your "filing folder" should be done at the end of each day or during a slow time.

I hope this helps you become better organized.

Posted by: Eliza | February 08, 2008 at 03:46 PM