

Making It Work -- Once You Have Hired a PCA

Many things go into a good working relationship between the PCA and the consumer. A sense of respect for one another seems to be at the top of everybody's list. That can come through in many ways. But as the boss, consumers are the ones who really set the tone in the workplace.

Expectations -- Consumers need to think about the standards for their care, and if they are reasonable and how they will effectively communicate and reinforce those expectations.

It has helped many consumers to write these down and review them with their new hires. Too much information can overwhelm everybody so try to go for your basic outline and the order in which things happen. This can be put on a small file card to reinforce the routine in the beginning.

Adaptations -- Busy bee consumers like myself must remember that every PCA has their own pace and style. Each PCA is different, functioning at a certain pace.

Go for the positives of that person. Work with their strengths. And be honest about your own strengths and weaknesses -- it turns the dynamic into a We.

When I notice that I am starting to operate with Great Expectations, I get back in the habit of pulling out my Helper Notebook -- after the PCA and I have said hello. This is a place to write down the day's goals and even gauge the time to see if my thinking is realistic.

If a PCA needs a day off, ask them to let you know as early as possible so that you can get back up. Not allowing your employee to have their needed time off can backfire. If you want your PCAs to be reasonable with you, then you need to be reasonable with them. In the end it is all a negotiation between two people, but how you do it matters the most.

Consistency -- The more consistent you are across the board with all your employees, the better your operation will run.

- When Martha sees that Mary comes in late everyday without a word, yet she gets constantly called on it, Martha may end up holding a grudge.
- When Leigh is the person who always does the housecleaning and some of the other PCAs are sloppy or negligent, it's likely that Leigh, as nice as she is, will eventually get fed up, maybe even leave the job.

Honesty -- One thing I emphasize time and again with my PCAs is honesty. That means on both our parts. If I'm getting frustrated with someone because they are not cleaning the leg bag properly or they are leaving dishes in the sink for the next person to clean up, I had better speak up reasonably to them. Otherwise I will end up acting out -- saying something caustic, or biting their head off unexpectedly. No one likes to be spoken to in an unappreciative manner.

The same holds true for the PCA. If we encourage our PCAs to air their grievances honestly, we will improve our relationship with them and very likely increase the longevity and loyalty in that relationship.

What would that look like?
A consumer might say –

"It's very important to me to hear from you when you are upset about something. I don't know that I can change it, but I am always willing to discuss things and see what we can do to improve the situation."

Or:

"Please ask me if you have questions about your paycheck (taxes, duties, whatever) and I will do my best to explain things or point you in the right direction."

Provide Resources -- If at all possible, have a place in your room or your house where your PCAs can look at notices-workshops-handbooks-and other resource numbers. I put these next to the

clipboard with the timesheets. Sometimes we have to remind ourselves to look at these things early in the shift rather than when people are leaving. You can have the greatest setup for all this but if you don't create a pause point to look at stuff, it isn't going to happen.

Be Nice! --

We can bring up somebody's procedural mistake or behavior without being accusatory.

It often helps to do a group review –

"Hey Carol I'm getting concerned about how the leg bags are getting cleaned. I'm asking everybody to go over it with me." Review what they do and let them know how you would like it to be done and why.

Or a non-blaming approach --

"I've been noticing that there are lots of dishes in the sink some nights and we really have to stop doing that. Do I give you enough time to do them? -- Do think you could do that while you are waiting for the coffee to brew?"

I have sometimes felt tensions with a PCA when I feel I am being patronized or notice them trying to making decisions for me. This can be a sign of helper burn out, so I will ask how they are doing and let them know how I'm feeling. Unfortunately, it can be a sign to start looking for somebody new. I would rather hold onto a good relationship with the PCA than burn my bridges with a sour ending. Many times former helpers who I had tensions with come back years later or refer a friend. We are in community with our PCAs. Think about what kind of community you want to build in your life.