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This is the age of transitory labor. The most recent labor statistics on employee tenure indicate that the average worker will spend 4.6 years in one position.¹ Over a series of 10 years, those engaged in “healthcare support occupations” average 3.2 years, and those identified as “healthcare practitioners and technical occupations” average 4.9 years.² In a climate of economic growth, we can expect even higher turnover rates as people who stayed in hospitals and clinics during the Great Recession will start to look for greener pastures.



Employers can pull best practices from workforce models with a high tolerance for transition. Organizations that master these principles normalize transition by building succession planning into every step of the employee engagement processes.

COPE Health Solutions has operated COPE Health Scholars, a series of experiential education programs for pre-health professionals, for the last 16 years. These programs are intentionally high-touch and high-turnover, and a key to their success is the involvement of student leaders at each host organization (typically a hospital or ambulatory network). Student leadership teams, under the title L3ADERS³, assist in the day-to-day operations of an immensely complex, hands-on health care educational experience. But these critical L3ADERS will often stay only a year, perhaps two at most. The reality is that from day one, these L3ADERS are planning **to replace themselves**.

Hiring supervisors and human resources departments are typically not receptive to talk from employees about transitioning to a different organization. This has largely to do with the amount of resources invested in candidates before day one on the job. But this ignores reality – they will go, they must go, in order to grow, learn

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employee Tenure in 2014*, <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/tenure.nr0.htm>

² Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Table 6. Median years of tenure with current employer for employed wage and salary workers by occupation, selected years, 2004-14”, *Employee Tenure in 2014*, <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/tenure.t06.htm>

³ The “L3” in the name refers to mission of the student leaders: “To enhance an educational experience for our peers, advance their health care careers and develop them into the next generation of best-fit health care professionals” - otherwise expressed as linking, learning and leading.

and be competitive in the health care market. Organizations who normalize transition will have an edge to compete in what can understatedly be described as a challenging job market.

The L3ADERS lifecycle is split into phases, with each phase emphasizing the expectation of transition.

Selection

All interviewers ask, “How long do you plan to stay with the organization?” For a L3ADER, we ask, “*Why* do you plan to stay that long?” If a person cannot articulate why they want to stay as long as they say, then they have not thought about the topic enough.

It is risky for an interviewer to simply accept a timeline given by the interviewee. Applicants know that more time always sounds better.

Orientation

Once accepted, a L3ADER is placed through a rigorous training and onboarding process. One of the items on the checklist is the creation of a succession plan, immediately. The goal of this succession plan is to begin to document their day-to-day operations, a guide that is extremely helpful for the person who will eventually replace them.

Development

The COPE Health Scholars programs are, at their core, educational. Thus, we expose L3ADERS to as many opportunities as possible, knowing that their future success is our future success. We require and constantly review a professional development plan, one that includes their future educational or employment goals.

For employers, using the successes of other organizations as learning opportunities is a show of strength and of transparency to their employees. By assisting employees in navigating the transitory workforce market, the organization demonstrates confidence – a confidence that is rewarded with employee loyalty.

Operations

Weekly or bi-weekly check-ins with supervisors always include a succession plan review and discussion. We engage in the transition discussion, and thus are invited to influence it. Most employers position themselves in opposition to transitions, and thus are only brought into the process when the employee is ready to leave.

Furthermore, we ask that a L3ADER’S succession plan always include the person who the L3ADER feels should replace them: another member of the COPE Health Scholar programs who they feel would work better, faster and smarter than they did.

Succession

By the time a transition notice is given, we know where a L3ADER is going, why they are leaving, what type of work they are leaving behind and a good deal about who will replace them.

Following this model, COPE Health Scholars supports over 360 L3ADERS supervising over 4,000 students in two states, and has been doing so for over 16 years. We have seen some of the most incredible health care

leaders come through our leadership program, and just as importantly, we have seen them go on to fantastic opportunities. We have not just accepted transition, but consider it the new normal.

COPE Health Solutions manages student experience programs that foster a “win-win” relationship for partner health care facilities, offering students a chance to learn and experience the health care environment while providing our partners a large pool of engaged, patient-centered support that is well-trained to assist with basic patient comfort care.

About COPE Health Solutions

COPE Health Solutions is a Los Angeles-based health care consulting firm that advises hospitals and health care systems on strategy, population health management, Medicaid waivers and workforce development solutions. COPE Health Solutions provides clients with the tools, services and advice they need to be leaders in the health care industry.

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