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## *Tips From the Top*

Managers Share Their Thoughts on Performance and Getting Ahead

*By Teresa Odle, Contributing Writer*

**Do you ever wonder what your manager is thinking?** You want to please your supervisor. You might even want a promotion, but you aren't sure how to go about it. Here are some tips straight from the mouths of managers, starting with what they look for in a new hire.

**1** ***Experience helps.*** Job stability and a good work ethic are important to Christina Thomas, B.S., R.T.(R)(MR), radiology information systems manager for the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson, Miss. Ms. Thomas wants to know that the radiologic technologist “has had some decent work experience and responsibilities.”

It's also important to have competence that's commensurate with your experience, said Bernadette Garofola, M.Ed., R.T.(R)(T)(CT). Ms. Garofola is chief therapist at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital Bodine Center for Cancer Treatment in Philadelphia. “They'll need to acclimate to the ‘Jefferson way’ of doing procedures, but a certified therapist would come with the basic knowledge and skill set,” she said.

*“...therapy is a career, not just a job. They attend workshops and seminars and are involved in a professional organization.”*



*Bernadette Garofola*

**2. Stand out in the crowd.** Ms. Garofola lists a few qualities that capture her attention once new hires start work. Among these is cooperation. “They realize that a radiation therapist is a member of a team delivering quality patient care,” she said. Other qualities she notices are an eagerness to learn and willingness to ask questions to deepen understanding, flexibility, adaptability and professionalism. She appreciates it when a new staff member “realizes that therapy is a career, not just a job. They attend workshops and seminars and are involved in a professional organization.”

Dedication to the department makes an employee stand out to Julia Davis, LVN, CCVT, a patient care manager at Brackenridge Hospital in Austin, Texas. “A relationship of trust between the manager and the employee is paramount,” she said.

**3. Step up to the plate.** Ms. Davis rewards dedication. When it comes time for promotions or additional training, managers already have a good idea which staff members to choose. “Just because you’ve been there for 15 years doesn’t make you the best and the brightest,” said Ms. Davis. It’s the employee who doesn’t closely watch the clock and punch the time card that she notices. The technologist who notes the heavy workload and offers to help stands out.

Ms. Thomas agreed. “Dedication and willingness to step forward and take initiative” are key qualities. Career counselor Thomas J. Denham, M.Ed., a partner with Careers in Transition LLC in Albany, N.Y., said that you have to stay in the driver’s seat of your career. “If you’re a passenger, you’re just doing the minimum. And you cannot do the minimum today. What you have to do is above and beyond the call of duty,” said Mr. Denham.

**4. Start driving.** “I think employees need to take more responsibility for their careers,” said Michelle Hutchings-Medina, B.S., R.T.(T). Ms. Hutchings-Medina is a staff radiation therapist at Washington University in St. Louis. She also has held several management positions, worked for equipment vendors and given presentations on workplace performance and investing in employees. “You can’t sit and wait for someone to identify you [for an opening] or think that your manager is going to know your particular interests,” said Ms. Hutchings-Medina.

Ms. Thomas said, “If an employee is interested in a promotion or management position, the best thing to do is to actually come and talk to me about it. My theory is if you’re interested, let me know.” Ms. Hutchings-Medina said that projects are a missed opportunity. “We often look for a particular position, but those can be few and far between. Get involved in a project; that’s experience you can put on your résumé,” she said.

**5. Walk the walk.** Good managers must “walk the walk so they can talk the talk,” said Mike Lewis, R.T.(R), PACS administrator for Cheyenne Radiology and MRI in Cheyenne, Wyo. He keeps up his R.T. certification and license while he continues his education in computer and networking technology. Ms. Thomas agreed that the best managers are those who have “been there, been in your footsteps and done it. They never forget where they came from and stay involved in the area.” She operates on the theory that she is a radiologic technologist first.

Those considering management should choose a mentor to help them learn about supervision. “I am fortunate enough that Linda Holden was and is my mentor and my friend,” said Mr. Lewis. “I don’t pretend to ever do the things that my mentor has accomplished, but I’ve learned how to find my own path from her and I am happier because of it,” he said.



*Christina Thomas*

*“Dedication and willingness to step forward and take initiative.”*

*... vacations help him continue to feel positive about his job.*



*Mike Lewis*

**6. Steer clear of pet peeves.** Just about every manager has pet peeves. Often, they're the actions and qualities directly opposite those that help employees get ahead. These actions help radiologic technologists get noticed, but for the wrong reasons. Ms. Thomas said that when employees take shortcuts and fail to follow through, she is sure to take note. "In general, a lack of organizational skills" is a pet peeve of hers.

Mostly, being complacent and doing a mediocre job instead of taking initiative will get under a manager's skin. A casual approach to sick time and its impact on fellow workers causes resentment among staff, said Ms. Garofola. She added that employees should call in when running late. "People calling in sick when they're not really sick and then complaining because they don't have any vacation time" shows a lack of dedication, added Ms. Davis.

**7. Be open to evaluation.** Performance appraisals are part of the job. Most managers sit down with their employees at least annually and assess their performance. And sometimes they have to bring up performance problems or even discipline an employee in the interim. Ms. Thomas said that, although she follows her institution's human resources policies, she also tries to approach performance issues by working with her employees and saying something to the effect, "I know it could be a bad time or a bad day, but you've got to change this [behavior]; is there anything I can do to help?" As Ms. Thomas said, "I prefer that we work through it, but if it gets to the point that the employee is not trying to work on [the problem], then you have to take the other path – the less desired path," she said. That eventually can lead to a formal write-up and termination.

It's best to accept that not everyone has consistently outstanding performance and that constructive criticism is part of the learning process. "I would like employees to be open to constructive criticism and not be defensive," said Ms. Garofola.

**8. Feedback works both ways.** Ms. Hutchings-Medina said that employees need to go to their managers, "not just once a year for your performance evaluation but by having periodic meetings." Ask to chat about what's going on in the department and potential opportunities. Give some clues about your particular areas of interest, said Ms. Hutchings-Medina. Ms. Davis said a working dialogue helps establish the trust she values in her employees.

**9. Avoid burnout.** Ongoing communication also helps Ms. Davis keep her staff of 42 employees from burning out. With five clinical areas including cardiac catheterization and special procedures, she relies on radiologic technologists to let her know when they need a change of pace. "We can switch modalities. Staff members can always come up to me and let me know that they haven't worked on cerebrals in a long time or tell me they are burned out on cerebrals. We constantly challenge each other to go to different modalities, so we're constantly energized," Ms. Davis said.

What happens away from work is important, too. Ms. Thomas said that she encourages radiologic technologists who have part-time jobs to be sure they get the second job in something they enjoy. "When you leave work, leave work," she said.

And that means literally, as in take a vacation. According to the Families and Work Institute in New York, Americans are not only overworked, but they also are doing too little about it. In *OverWork in America: When the Way We Work Becomes Too Much*, the institute studied how Americans work and looked in-depth at how we use our vacations. While 79 percent of U.S. employees have access to paid vacations – an average of 16.6 days per year – more than one-third of them do not plan to use their full vacations.

Mr. Lewis loves his job but makes sure that he gets to a cruise ship every few years "so I can't contact the office and they can't contact me," he said. He believes these vacations help him continue to feel positive about his job.

*"Choosing a place that matches your career goals is important,"*



Michelle Hutchings-Medina

*"We constantly challenge each other to go to different modalities, so we're constantly energized."*



Julia Davis with staff technologists Glen Dawkins, left, and Alex Pena.

# 10. *Make good choices.* Ms. Hutchings-Medina said that many radiologic technologists end up chasing the dollar at the expense of considering if a work environment helps their long-term goals. “Choosing a place that matches your career goals is important,” she said.

Sometimes the fit is just not right. Managers try to work with an employee in most situations. But Ms. Garofola said if she hires a radiation therapist and it’s not a good fit, sometimes it’s better to let the therapist go than to subject the entire staff to disruption and conflict. It’s one of the tougher aspects of management – the hard choices supervisors have to make.

Radiologic technologists are faced with many choices as employees that affect their working relationships, their relationships with managers and their future careers. As Mr. Lewis said, “It’s all about choices. Make wise ones.”

## click list

### Families and Work Institute

[www.familiesandwork.org](http://www.familiesandwork.org)

The nonprofit Families and Work Institute publishes research and reports on the balance between work and family roles, as well as issues surrounding the changing workplace and community. The Web site includes articles from numerous national newspapers and magazines citing the institute’s research and its influence on national and local policy decision making. The focus isn’t just on employers; a section devoted to workplace flexibility includes a tip sheet for employees. The institute also offers information on family issues.



### National Career Development Association

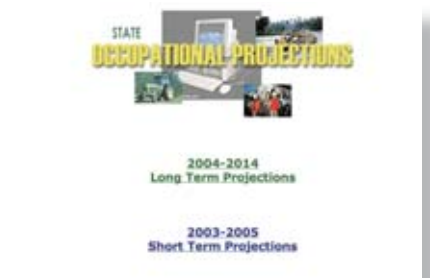
[www.ncda.org](http://www.ncda.org)

Career counselor Thomas J. Denham, M.Ed., is a member of this professional organization that promotes career development. Clicking on Career Center brings up guidelines for selecting a counselor and a page that lists them by state. Career counselors aren’t just valuable when looking for work. They can help radiologic technologists plan future career goals and how to work toward these goals, help them deal with interpersonal issues at work and offer suggestions for dealing with stress on the job. The site also includes a list of resource links.

### State Occupational Projections

[www.projectionscentral.com](http://www.projectionscentral.com)

Many misconceptions persist in the radiology and radiation oncology fields concerning job growth and projections. In addition to the latest research from the ASRT and other organizations such as the American Registry of Radiologic Technologists, statistics from the Bureau of Labor Statistics can give a true picture. The beauty of this site is that it gives projections by state – a more targeted picture than national trends. Supply and demand still can vary within a state, depending on local economics and competition.



### Professional Association of Résumé Writers and Career Coaches

[www.parw.com](http://www.parw.com)

You may have to spend some money for the services of a professional résumé writer or career coach. But if you’re seriously considering a job change, it might be worth the investment. If you decide to seek help, go to this Web site to search for certified professionals. From the home page, click on several choices of professionals — which are conveniently defined — to find one in your area. Health care recruiters also can be very helpful; just be sure to establish a level of trust and determine that they’re looking out for your interests. ♦