Healthcare workers, like other employed Americans, are likely to have several jobs during their life. Statistically, adult workers typically change jobs at least 3 times during their lifetime. Changing jobs may not necessarily mean changing organizations, because it is possible, over time, to have many roles within the same healthcare facility. However, some job changes may involve going to a new setting, a different part of the country, or entering a new facet of the healthcare field or a different career, altogether. Every time a person changes jobs, and/or assumes a new role, he or she typically goes through several specific stages of adjustment, referred to as “reality shock”. Each stage may have any number of names, but, no matter, they basically deal with the process an employee goes through as he or she is being socialized into a new role. The initial period of euphoria, when first hired, is followed by a sense of shock, fear and anxiety once the realities of the job are learned. Hopefully, this is followed by a period of adjustment.

This newsletter will discuss common causes and feelings during each of the stages of “reality shock”, which are referred to as the honeymoon, shock and adjustment periods. How to cope with, as well as how to assist yourself and co-workers during each stage of employment, will also be described.

**REALITY SHOCK**

Reality shock, culture shock, typically occurs as a new employee learns to become a member of an existing work group. When you join a new group, you must become socialized - learn how to behave, feel and see the world in a manner similar to others occupying the same role as yourself. Socialization involves learning the “official” rules, regulations, policies and procedures of how things work.

Rules may also be informal, such as the fact that no one actually takes the breaks they are entitled to, or perhaps, the supervisor doesn’t leave the work area for lunch, so no one else does either, and so on.

If the stages of reality shock are not completed satisfactorily, it is common for the employee’s position to be terminated, either by resigning or being fired. Often, those who change jobs more than 3 times in 5 years are considered “job-hoppers” and they may be looked upon as a hiring risk by future employers. Not only can staff turnover affect individual employees, presently and in the future, it can also affect the whole organization. Any time an employee leaves or comes, there is an interruption in the team’s functioning.

**THE HONEYMOON PERIOD**

When you were first hired at your current job, or when you transferred to another department or unit, you likely had feelings of excitement and anticipation surrounding your new position. You were also probably thrilled, maybe grateful, to get hired. Perhaps you had just completed extensive education and/or training to be qualified for this new position. You probably had butterflies before starting your new job, but enthusiastically jumped out of bed on your first day or so. You may have been excited about the process of getting your ID badge, to learn where to park, where to eat, your way around the facility and to meet new co-workers. You may even have dreamed of really making a difference.

During this initial period of employment, there is often an orientation period, probably one involving the total healthcare facility, to provide the information you need to function effectively in the organization. It may have familiarized you with such things as the mission, purpose and goals of the facility, as well as safety issues. There also was likely a unit and/or position-specific orientation. Often new employees will be assigned a preceptor, a mentor or buddy. It may also be a more informal relationship, where an experienced employee takes a new employee “under their wing.” Remember, new employees, no matter their age or experience, often feel overwhelmed with all the new information, such as policies and procedures, and may be concerned with how they will remember, let alone, how they will follow it all. To benefit the whole team, it is advisable that all “old” employees make every attempt to be helpful, reassuring and welcoming to the newcomer, rather than taking on a “sink or swim” philosophy.
Don’t be too busy to help a new co-worker in their new role. It will, ultimately, benefit everyone. During the honeymoon period, it is important for the new employee to act, somewhat like a by-stander. While you are actively learning your job, don’t be a change agent. Take the time to really take in the various personalities of your co-workers, as well as pay attention to the unofficial norms of the group. What time do they arrive at work? - is it 15 minutes before the scheduled time, so everyone can catch-up with each other before getting to work, or is it minutes or seconds before the shift starts. And, try to refrain from criticizing or critiquing how things are done. No one, particularly initially, wants to hear “How you used to do it” or “What you learned in school.” Be non-threatening, non-judgmental and listen and learn. Likely, when you’ve been employed at the same job for several weeks or months, those initial feelings of euphoria will dwindle. Perhaps it will be replaced by shock and disenchantment.

**SHOCK PERIOD**

You wake to the familiar wail of your alarm clock. A few months ago, you would've thrown back the covers and bounded out of bed in anticipation of the workday ahead. Today, you flail for the “snooze” button. You just don't feel like going to work. The honeymoon is over – the “rosy picture” of the job conditions that were painted by you, or others, are simply not true. The job you took six months ago seemed like the best idea in the world - great company, great people, lots of challenges and excitement. But, now you simply feel unprepared, over your head and even angry. Tasks, once perceived as challenges, become problems that are avoided for as long as possible. You may have feelings of overwhelming shock and anxiety when faced with the reality of being on your own, accountable and responsible for your job.

Besides psychological stress, as the term "shock" implies, physical symptoms, such as extreme tiredness, nausea, headaches and tremors, often emerge. The physical and emotional stress can be so bad that it may lead to time off work. You may normally pride yourself on doing a thorough job, a high quality performance. However, during this disillusionment stage, you may be looking for shortcuts, if not cutting corners. And this gnaws at your self-esteem. There may even be pangs of guilt. It can also lead to job dissatisfaction, the root of much dysfunctional, negative behavior in the workplace. This is also the time employees are likely to seek “greener pastures”. A “shocked” employee may terminate this current position, in an attempt to regain those initial feelings of euphoria and control. Sometimes this is best for everybody, but too often turnover represents wasted recruitment and training costs and the loss of valued, experienced employees.

During the hiring process, giving prospective employees a realistic preview of the job, including any negative aspects, does not significantly reduce the number of people who accept the job, but can reduce turnover by more than half during the first year. If shock occurs, finding a supportive co-worker, whom you respect, to share your feelings with is helpful. Likely, this co-worker has experienced similar feelings, in the past or present. Even telling your supervisor how you are feeling may be beneficial. Shock is a normal reaction to a new job - with new rules, roles and co-workers. Simply retreating, being a job-hopper, will likely be counter-productive, personally, as well as in future jobs.

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<th>HONEYMOON</th>
<th>SHOCK</th>
<th>ADJUSTMENT</th>
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<td>Everything is wonderful – “This is the best job I’ve ever had.”</td>
<td>Disenchanted – “Yikes, what have I done?”; “Why did I ever think I could do this job?”</td>
<td>Can see good and bad parts of the job, objectively.</td>
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<td>Boundless energy</td>
<td>Fatigue – mental and physical</td>
<td>Learning how to cope with stress begins, such as talking to one or two co-workers.</td>
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<td>Assumes all staff are enthusiastic</td>
<td>Resentment and hostile feelings towards self and others</td>
<td>Begins to balance work and personal life</td>
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<tr>
<td>Infinitely polite and patient</td>
<td>Negative attitude and conflicts with staff are common</td>
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**ADJUSTMENT PERIOD**

During the adjustment period, you resolve to stay with your job. You decide to accept, or cope with, the realities of your roles and responsibilities and strive to make the best of it. You may also, eventually, adopt behaviors and an attitude of commitment to why you wanted to perform this job in the first place. You may also join hospital-wide or unit committees in an attempt to implement change for what you deem important and beneficial to customers, as well as to yourself and other staff.

The stages of marriage are often compared to those of employment. Initially, during the honeymoon period, literally, romance and marital bliss typically abound. As the realities of your role as a husband or wife sets in, as well as life’s obligations, including paying bills and cooking, shock - “What have I done?”; “It wasn’t supposed to be like this!” often sets in. At this point, separation and divorce may occur, or infidelities within the marriage, in an attempt to recapture that blissful period. The same goes in the relationship between an employee and his or her job. You may leave a job during the shock phase, only to find out that the honeymoon period is always short-lived. Hopefully, you will work on this in your job.

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POPMULATION/AGE-SPECIFIC EDUCATION POST TEST

Personal Growth...
A Newsletter for All Staff

March 2009

Competency: Demonstrates Age-Specific Competency by correctly answering 9 out of 10 questions related to Reality Shock - The “Honeymoon” Is Over.

REALITY SHOCK... THE “HONEYMOON” IS OVER

1. Reality shock is considered a normal reaction to new rules, roles and co-workers.
   a. True
   b. False

2. Reality shock:
   a. affects only young employees, because they are inexperienced.
   b. is directed at supervisors, primarily, followed by co-workers.
   c. may occur when a person changes jobs or assumes a new role.
   d. is an abnormal response to increased job responsibilities.

3. During the shock phase, tensions typically ease as you are able to balance work with your personal life.
   a. True
   b. False

4. People who leave their jobs are most likely to do so during the adjustment period.
   a. True
   b. False

5. Fran, a new employee states, “Wow, this is a great job!” She is likely:
   a. in the honeymoon stage, believing everything is wonderful.
   b. questioning her own competency about being able to do this job.
   c. unaware of how such a comment can make others judgmental.
   d. adjusting to the new job, by committing to her new role.
6. When employees feel unprepared, "over their head" and even angry, they are likely:
   a. stuck in the honeymoon stage.
   b. feeling shock surrounding their new job.
   c. to avoid confrontation with others.
   d. able to see the good and bad parts of their job objectively.

7. Job dissatisfaction and negative behavior usually result from:
   a. having to report to a new supervisor.
   b. feeling a prolonged sense of euphoria about your new job.
   c. hearing positive, encouraging words from experienced co-workers.
   d. overwhelming shock about the reality of being on your own.

8. Socialization into a new position is important because it:
   a. specifically dictates how you should and should not behave.
   b. helps you learn to become a member of an existing work group.
   c. forces you to cope with the bad aspects of a new job.
   d. helps you find shortcuts, by learning bad habits from others.

9. When employees start a new job, it is appropriate that they do all of the following EXCEPT:
   a. point out how they used to do things at their former job.
   b. take the time to take in the various personalities of co-workers.
   c. tell a trusted co-worker if they are feeling overwhelmed.
   d. act somewhat like a by-stander, rather than a change agent.

10. "Old", experienced co-workers play an important role in welcoming and supporting newer employees.
   a. True
   b. False