

ON SECOND THOUGHT

by Binseng Wang

Which Service Organization Should You Work For?

A few months ago, I wrote an article for *Healthcare Technology Management* magazine in which I asked the question: "Which service company should you select to maintain your equipment?" Now I want to address the same issue from a different perspective — that of the service professional. With the massive consolidation of healthcare organizations and outsourcing of equipment management functions, many clinical engineers and biomedical engineering technicians are being forced to change jobs. I would like to offer them some ideas on how they can choose new employers.

Traditionally, hospitals offered higher compensation and better stability than ISOs; but while wages may still be slightly higher in hospitals (often simply because of automatic annual adjustments), recent history is proving that stability is no longer guaranteed. Even unions cannot help save their members when hospitals decide to eliminate entire departments and outsource their functions.

Service companies may not offer stability, but they do provide upward mobility, which is severely limited within hospitals. When is the last time you heard of a CE promoted to senior executive within a hospital? Service companies provide excellent opportunities — including higher incomes — for those aggressive individuals who want to become managers, migrate into sales, or start their own businesses. Geographic mobility is difficult to achieve with hospitals, even when employed by large chains. Within nationwide service companies it is usually possible to relocate without too much difficulty. Of course, in-house staffs are seldom required to travel, whereas field service personnel are on the road most of the time. Overtime and on-call duties are comparable for both types of organizations.

Another growth opportunity offered by service companies is in the area of training. Because service expertise is essential for the survival of the business, the training provided to BMETs tends to be more detailed and covers multiple brands and products. On the other hand, training in hospitals is often provided OJT by peers or more experienced co-workers rather than through factory schools. Some more enlightened organizations even provide financial aid for staff members who want to continue their formal education.

CEs and BMETs who work inside hospitals also

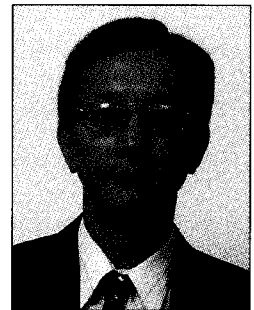
have greater opportunities to interact with and learn from physicians and other healthcare workers than their counterparts in ISOs. And in-house staff often participate in research projects and other "extracurricular" activities that make them feel more appreciated than just providing support services. Some get motivated to become doctors and scientists. In service companies, the staff is closely monitored by supervisors and must concentrate on productivity, thereby limiting their pursuit of other interests during work hours.

CEs and BMETs who decide to join for-profit companies should be very careful in their selection of employer because not all ISOs are well-managed. Many are taking advantage of the latest outsourcing fad and jumping into the service market promising miraculous cost reductions without any of the benefits of system integration or multi-institutional cross-pollination. Like any other industry in rapid transition, unscrupulous people can and will take advantage of the situation before many hospitals realize what has occurred.

To help you find organizations that are as committed to safety, quality and cost-effectiveness as you are, ask yourself the following questions and respond on an A through F scale: 1) Will I be proud of what the company is offering to its customers? 2) Will I be proud of what I do for the company in terms of quality and cost-effectiveness? 3) Is the company genuinely interested in improving its services by listening to its customers and employees? 4) Are the company's customers satisfied with the services they receive? 5) Would I recommend the company to my friends and family?

If you gave the company more than a B average, then you have found a reasonably good place to work. If less than a B average, you should start polishing up your resume. If you answered every question with an A+, don't tell anyone else but me so I can fax you my resume!

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