



MANAGEMENT

Hiring Your Friends

Tapping a trusted colleague from a previous job is becoming common practice in healthcare. But experts warn to pick judiciously—the superstar employee from your past may or may not fit with the new organization's culture. **BY JIM MOLPUS**

JANICE COSBY HAD A JOB SHE LOVED AS director of marketing and public relations at 212-staffed-bed North Oakland Medical Centers in Pontiac, Mich., but it didn't stop her from tendering her resignation in July 2001 to take a similar position at 480-staffed-bed Sinai-Grace Hospital in Detroit.

Similarly, Cosby enjoyed her time at Sinai-Grace. But she left anyway in fall 2003 to take a position at 715-staffed-bed St. Vincent Indianapolis Hospital, nearly 300 miles away. No, she isn't a habitual job hopper; this latest move came with great sacrifice since she commutes to this position while Cosby's husband and children remain back in Detroit.

The common denominator in each move? Cosby left each job to follow her boss Patricia Maryland, now president of St. Vincent. "This is my third job with Pat," Cosby says. "Pat is just such a dynamic leader. We just make a great team, and I love working with her."

For Maryland, having Cosby by her side at St. Vincent has allowed her to jumpstart internal and external communication plans, a top priority when she began last fall. "I felt that I needed to bring talent I had already worked with, who had the skills in place to come into this role without any learning curve and provide me with the leadership and support that Janice has provided me," Maryland says.

It might seem unlikely that someone would just pick up and leave a job they are happy with in order to stay with a beloved employer, but in healthcare where quick turnarounds and strong senior team dynamics are key, the practice is not at all uncommon. Scores of healthcare CEOs are plucking talent from previous jobs as they move to new organizations. Whether it is someone from the immediate or distant past, these executives place a high premium on successful relationships and will snap up a former associate whenever an opportunity presents itself.

Terry Hindmarch, managing partner of Phoenix-based retained executive search firm TowerHunter, says the idea that a CEO would bring along a key member of the leadership team from one organization to another happens more than occasionally, and closer to often. Most healthcare CEOs tend to bring along a chief financial officer, followed by a chief operating officer, then the clinical officers, he observes.



• **SAVVY RECRUITING.** Patricia Maryland, president of St. Vincent Indianapolis Hospital, has worked with public relations pro Janice Cosby at three different hospitals. Maryland says having Cosby on board gives her the support she needs without the learning curve.

Tim Frischmon, vice president of retained healthcare executive search firm Rockford, Ill.-based Furst Group, shares similar views and says he sees considerable transition in teams. "Executives who are coming into organizations are constantly looking at how they can leverage their past experiences with people whom they know they can work very well with, who have performed for them in the past and are the right talent to accomplish the goals that are at hand," Frischmon says.

The chief reason executives bring along a past associate is for their skill set. After that, incoming CEOs are looking for a relationship that works in the new setting.

"We spend so much time focusing around cultural fit," Frischmon says.

But there are certain protocols to keep in mind before grabbing your entire portfolio of past employees. Executives first should assess the quality of the existing team they have been hired to lead. Bringing in too many new people may send the wrong message, Hindmarch explains. "There will be things about the culture that the new leader will want to maintain and things they want to change. Given those circumstances, the strength of his or her leadership team may have worked in their prior organization, but that whole team might not fit into that new organization."

Moreover, in some cases there is a risk of even creating a "them or us" scenario, Hindmarch says. "Just like in a merger or acquisition, the purchaser wins out and the leaders that are still left around, if they remain, don't remain very effective. So you should be selective of who and how many you bring in."

Beyond the corporate culture challenge, legal barriers exist as well. Many senior executives are bound by contracts that may contain non-compete, non-solicitation or corporate-confidentiality clauses. Those may range in length from six months to a year on the short end, all the way up to two years in the case of some corporate officers, Frischmon says.

Conversely, the executive who is the follower also has unique factors to consider before taking on a new position. This person often must weigh the opportunities presented by the move with those that will likely open up as their boss leaves for a new company, Hindmarch says.

For Cosby, the advantages of sticking together have been tangible as she and Maryland work on new projects. Not only does she find the relationship a source of moral support for her, but it has improved her confidence when it comes to tackling future projects at St. Vincent because she knows the two are successful at solving problems. In her role Cosby acts as an unofficial "go-

between" for the new CEO as the staff gets to know her. "I have been able to help other people understand her management style."

Says Maryland: "Instead of going through a huge recruitment effort and paying for that in time and dollars, if you already have known talent that has worked for you in the past, bringing that talent along just makes a lot of business sense." Cosby believes that following a boss is about more than just climbing the corporate ladder. "It makes it much easier when you believe in the person you are leaving with. I don't think people do it just as a career move. I could not do this for just anybody."

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HealthLeaders ■ October 2004