Finding the right leadership for the Sterile Processing Department can be tricky. Sullivan has found that many leaders in SPD are exceptional technicians, but they are not great leaders. In *The Peter Principle*, Laurence J. Peter writes, “In a hierarchy, every employee tends to rise to his level of incompetence.” Good leadership in the OR requires more than “promoting” a talented staff member to a leadership role where he or she might not be as effective. Many hospitals promote knowledgeable staff out of their sweet spots into leadership roles. This frustrates them as well as everyone working in the OR. Lack of leadership skill causes reliance on content, which does not inspire teamwork.

Another issue is that hospitals have in fact hired a great leader, but that leader might not be properly equipped or might not have the correct systems in place to be able to lead well. Sometimes the program itself needs to be overhauled as it may be keeping a talented leader from being successful.

In addition, the leadership support structure might not be conducive to a smooth-running OR. If there is no one to educate new staff or if no one “owns” the instrument tracking system, the SPD organization might need to be restructured.
According to Sullivan Healthcare Consulting VP Bill Bailey, there are several strategies to help hospitals find the right fit for SPD leadership:

1. **Effective Interviewing.** Interview to find answers to the following questions: Does this person have leadership qualities? Does he or she inspire others? Can this individual engage people? Can he or she cast vision and create buy-in to that vision? Can he or she deal with complex issues? Does this person use feedback to change behavior? Does this person have content expertise? Does he or she understand the OR? Is this person visible in the OR? Is this individual a good communicator? Does he or she understand frustrations of patients, surgeons, and the C-Suite?

2. **Equip Leaders.** It’s possible that a hospital has indeed hired a great leader, but he or she needs coaching. If information is all that is needed, he or she could be the right person for the job. Sullivan has found that investing in a formal mentoring program specifically designed for SPD leaders, accelerates learning and maximizes that individual’s strengths and abilities to effectively lead.

3. **Improve Staff Structure.** Sullivan helps to build a team. The team needs a manager, a full-time educator, a staff member dedicated to instrument tracking, supervisor(s), and lead technician(s) - to align with specialization among nursing staff. Certainly one must consider the size and scope of the need to ultimately dictate the appropriate staffing model but it is clear that with the proper staff in place, the entire dynamic of the OR can change.

**Sullivan Healthcare Vice President Bill Bailey states, “The wrong leader affects everything: time, money, frustration, and the patient experience.”**

Sullivan has conducted hundreds of sterile processing department and leadership evaluations for hospitals. These assessments have often led to complete department turnarounds, inclusive of SPD leadership training and mentoring. During this transition, many hospitals have experienced great success by placing an Interim SPD Manager to jumpstart the transformation. Interim leadership helps implement the recommended strategies to improve the OR experience for patients and employees and therefore decrease turnover and increase hospital revenue.

Are your challenges with SPD management causing OR case delays, longer case times, OR staff overtime, and cancelled cases? **We can help.**

**Best Practice Sterile Processing Program Assessment**

Contact Us to Get Started: 1.866.303.8968