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Minimize Assumptions & Take the Guesswork out of the Equation

Part three of a special series on Health and Wellness in professional practices.

Tom Ellsworth • Mar. 12, 2010

This is Part Three of a Special Series on Health & Wellness

Part I: A Lesson to Learn

from Cross Country Skiers: Pace Yourself

Part II: Staying Focused

on Priorities in the Midst of Trivial Distractions

With April 15 bearing down upon us, I assume you are working harder than an incumbent U.S. Representative trying to locate a constituent who is pleased with Congress. Perhaps I'm wrong in my speculation; maybe you have everything under control. It's certainly not the first time I've blundered in such conjectures. I learned a long time ago — mostly the hard way — that assuming facts not yet established can be counterproductive. Instead of saving time and effort, assumptions can be major energy wasters. I assume ... uh, there I go again. I hope you have learned this same valuable truth.

We make daily assumptions often without thinking.

- We give the shower spigot a quick twist, assuming there will be hot water.
- We turn the ignition key, assuming the engine will roar to life.
- We head to the office at the regular time, assuming the line at the drive through coffee spot won't be longer than usual.

Life without such suppositions is nearly impossible; however, when it comes to your job, you must do your best to take the guess work out of the equation. It will save you a ton of heartache in the long run.

When you incorrectly assume something to be true, it will cost you valuable time and energy to remedy the problem. I've heard it said that assumptions are the lowest form of knowledge. We often resort to assumptions because we are in a hurry, but as the old adage goes, "haste makes waste." Slow down, stay focused, and think carefully.

Collecting too much information is better than not enough. Use whatever method you use for gathering information about your clients, such as a client organizer or CRM (customer relationship management) product. Devise a simple form to help you gather all the needed information from and about your clients.

This is one simple way in which your computer, the Internet and everyday programs can be a real timesaver. In fact, today's products offer so much in the way of collecting and organizing client information, often in a format that can be utilized completely online such as through portals. Take advantage of these timesaving tools. Don't try to wing things from memory; you will inevitably miss something important. Spend a little extra time up front to get the right information, and it will save you hours of wasted time and effort in correcting unnecessary mistakes based on faulty assumptions. Let's face it; you can't afford to squander any minutes at this point in busy season. Staying focused and organized not only saves you time, it also instills confidence in your clients.

When you incorrectly assume something to be true, you will appear less competent than you really are. When a new potential client comes to your office for your first meeting, how much do you assume?

- **He isn't wearing a wedding band – must be single.** In reality, he may be married with four kids but is employed in a job where any ring poses a hazard so he keeps his treasured band at home.
- **He appears older with all that white hair – must be retired.** In reality, he may be prematurely gray due to the stress of a failed business venture and simply cannot afford to retire now or in the foreseeable future.
- **He's driving an expensive, red sporty convertible – must be rich.** In reality, he may be up to his neck in debt, and his

1997 minivan with 125,000 miles showing on the odometer is in the shop.

Consequently,

he had to borrow his snooty brother-in-law's mid-life crisis car to get to your office.

If you act on your assumptions, your client will be amused, bewildered or embarrassed, but in any case you will come across less than competent. Get the facts straight, for your sake and your client's.

When you incorrectly assume something to be true, you will always be surprised at the outcome. Some years ago, I was returning home late one afternoon from an out-of-town meeting.

Traffic on the four-lane road was moving at a reasonable pace except for the aging, faded red pickup in the right-hand lane. As I neared the old truck, I noticed the driver through the dust streaked back glass. He appeared somewhat stooped shouldered as he manhandled the steering wheel with his left arm. His dull flannel shirt had seen better days, and his sweat-stained farmer's cap had tufts of gray hair sticking out all around the bottom of the brim.

Amazingly, his right arm was not resting on the steering wheel but was draped around the shoulders of a curly haired blond. From my vantage point, which was closing rapidly, she appeared far too young to be sitting that close.

Was this one of those May/December relationships that just doesn't make sense? What does a young blonde see in an old geezer anyway? As I pulled around to pass, I couldn't help but glance over into the cab of the truck. Imagine my shock when it was not a young blonde that returned my glance, but a golden haired retriever sitting next to his master. I swear the dog winked at me as if to say, "Surprise!"

What had moments before been a twisted courtship, was simply an endearing picture of friendship between an old farmer and his best four-legged friend. I learned a valuable lesson that day about assumptions — don't make them!

Reserve surprises for milestone birthday parties. In the work environment, the unexpected is seldom positive. So do yourself a favor; stop making assumptions or you may end up being as unpopular as that incumbent congressman who assumes he's got your vote.

This is Part Two of a Special Series on the Importance of Health & Wellness for Professionals

Part I: A Lesson to Learn from Cross

Country Skiers: Pace Yourself

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