

» white paper

Open Shift Management

**Understanding Staff Motivation is
Key to Filling Shifts**

Proactive vs. Reactive

Last-minute incentives offered to fill open shifts are essentially wasted dollars.



This was one of the findings illustrated by a research study conducted by Avantas to test, in part, the hypothesis that the offering of proactive incentives is a practical and cost-effective approach to filling high-need shifts.

Many organizations struggle with last-minute shortages in staff, a predicament typically forcing managers to post open shifts, email and phone staff, then barter and make deals to get the shifts filled. If the manager is unsuccessful, she will typically attempt to contract with agency staff, or run short.

This is a costly and time-consuming process that results in unnecessary overtime, exorbitant labor costs, worker fatigue, and poor morale, all of which eventually has a negative impact on patient care.

At the root of this is the failure to take into account what actually motivates staff to pick up open shifts.

Understanding Staff Motivation

Avantas undertook a study at two large hospital systems to examine perceived motivation versus manifest motivation in filling high-need nursing shifts and how a scheduling module of decreasing financial incentives as shift dates approached supported nurses' decisions.

The research was conducted at two multi-hospital systems, one in the Midwest and one in the eastern United States.

There were two distinct survey interventions: 1) An initial eight-question survey asked staff members' shift choice processes; 2) a one-question follow-up survey employed each time a staff member chose and confirmed a shift online. This question was related to each individual's motivation for picking up a particular shift.

The study illustrated two findings:

- Incentives calculated by degree of need in advance of the shift are more efficient than high-dollar last-minute incentives.
- Individuals' perceptions of what motivates them in selecting a shift and how those motives manifest in reality are often contradictory. In other words, individuals stating financial incentives were the primary motivator in shift selection demonstrated that their shift selections had as much if not more to do with how that shift fit into their schedule.

This second finding, regarding perceived versus actual motivation, points to the reason why reactive, last-minute incentives offered to fill open shifts are essentially wasted dollars and can result in program abuse (e.g., 11th hour bartering), inefficiency, perceptions of favoritism, spiraling costs, and a sense of entitlement among nursing staff.

This sense of entitlement refers to the expectation developed over time that all additional shifts picked up should be tied to the highest incentives. This mindset often leads to a stalemate that fails to fill the shift, decreases morale, and creates lasting tension between managers and staff.

Actual vs. Perceived Motivation

The surveys gathered in the study illustrated that money and life schedule were the most important factors considered when picking up a shift.

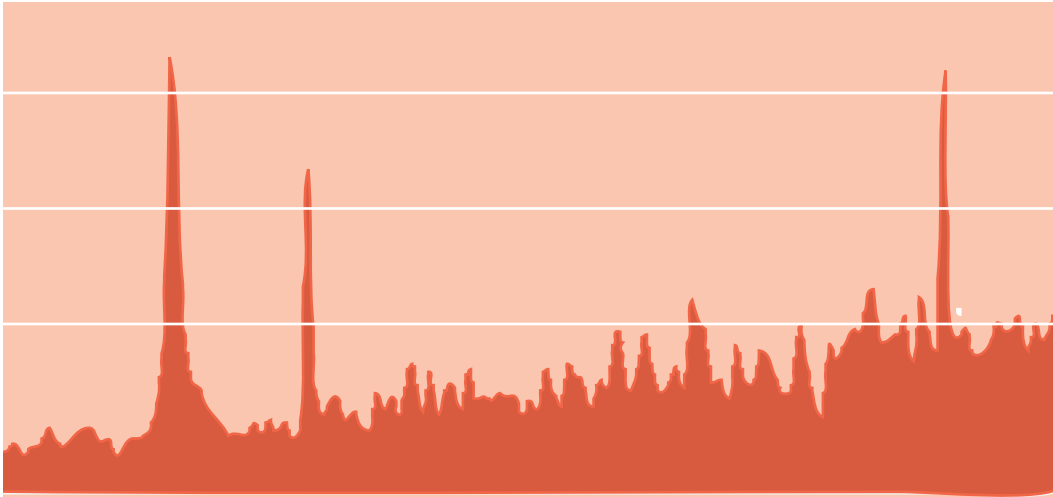
However, two stark differences in motivation to fill open shifts arose between contingency staffing groups and core staff:

- Contingency staff was less motivated by money the closer to the day of the shift they were scheduling. Convenience and additional hours needed were the main reasons members would pick up a shift less than one week in advance.
- Core staff members working over their FTE were more motivated by money than float pool staff.

These motivations point to the need for a scheduling module of decreasing financial incentives as shift dates approach. As money becomes less of a motivator as the day of the shift approaches it makes little sense to bait an immediate open shift with a high incentive. Rather, attractive monetary incentives well in advance of the shift that decrease as dates draw closer satisfy both staff motivators presented; they pay well, yet also enable staff members to plan their lives around their schedule by exchanging flexibility for dollars.

Automating Open Shift Management

The issue most healthcare organizations have with the proactive posting of open shifts is their inability to accurately predict patient demand. Understanding patient demand (volume), and what amount of staff is needed to adjust to its ebb and flow, is one of the five key labor management strategies capable of driving savings across the continuum of labor.²

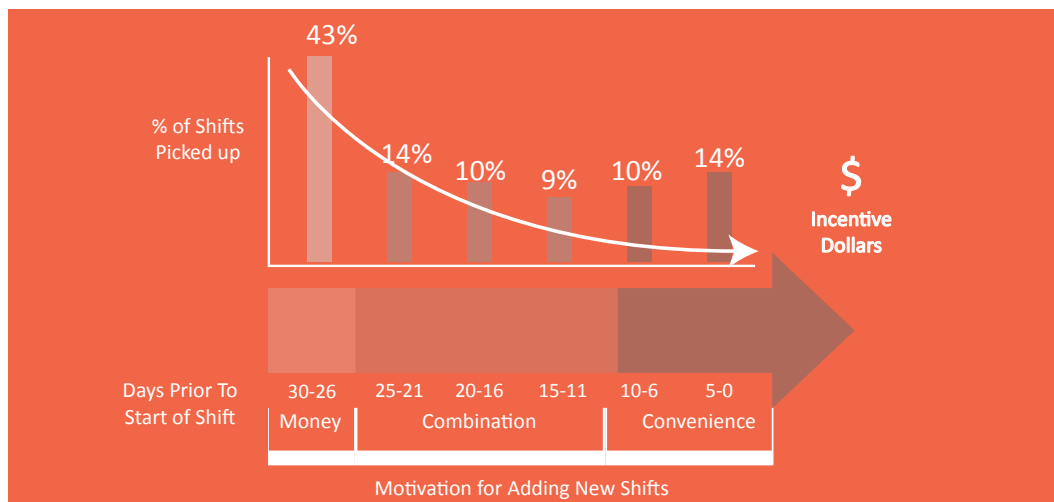


Within Avantas's proprietary labor management and productivity software, Smart Square, predictive analysis is used to forecast patient volume. Based on the census forecast, open shifts are posted within the software for qualified staff members to pick up. The incentive range is set by each hospital system in line with their budget. Those incentives fluctuate in real-time relative to need.

For example, incentives do not increase as the day of the shift approaches (reactive), but drop as shifts are picked up and the severity of the need to fill holes decreases. This protocol promotes proactive scheduling by providing the highest incentives 30 days in advance of the shift.

Proactive Scheduling Aligns with Staff Motivation

Data gathered over the course of the study pointed strongly to the effectiveness of a model of decreasing financial incentives as shift dates approach. As the following figure illustrates, 75% of shifts were picked up more than two weeks before the day of the shift, and 43% of shifts were picked up 30 days in advance, when peak incentives are offered.



When staff members' motivation lies more in flexibility and they are unable to sign up in advance, this model proves effective as well. The financial incentives may not be as high, but staff motivation is still satisfied by the flexibility that enables them to maintain a life schedule of their choice and still pick up extra shifts.

By tying the level of staff incentives to how far in advance nurses are willing to schedule a high-need shift, this model of declining incentives effectively fills needed shifts up to 30 days in advance, solidifying staffing plans sooner while offering a lifestyle incentive calculated to meet the needs of a flexible schedule. In this way, efficiency is built into the module and is driven by individual preferences – generating a higher level of staff satisfaction that can impact nurse recruitment and retention as well.³

About Avantas

Avantas is an Omaha, Neb.-based company devoted to serving the healthcare industry. Its proprietary scheduling and productivity solution, Smart Square®, is the only comprehensive labor management platform developed by healthcare professionals for healthcare professionals. Additionally, its consultation services provide its clients tailored best practice labor management strategies designed to drive substantial and sustaining cost and quality improvements across the enterprise.



Business Development Executive - **Larry Punteney** 402.717.7712

11128 John Galt Blvd., Suite 400, Omaha, NE 68137

toll-free 888.338.6148

www.avantas.com

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