

Radiology Group: The Performance Review**[ACR May, 2015]**

"I feel so crummy," said John Cutler, a partner at Private Practice Radiology Group (PPRG). "If there is one thing I really don't like about this job, it's the annual performance review. I am no good at it at all." "What happened?" Amanda Jamieson, another partner at PPRG, asked.

"I just gave Andrew Ross his second-year review, and I could not bring myself to be honest," said John. "As you know, Andy joined us two years ago after his fellowship, and he was well-trained: his clinical skills are fine. But he shows little aptitude or interest in building a team, practice enhancement, or business development, and he seems to have little interest in the overall financial side of the practice, other than his own salary, of course. The fact is, I'm not sure he has what it takes to be a partner here. And if and when he does become a partner, you and I know that his compensation will be similar to other practice members despite any differences in productivity or contribution to PPRG marketing or administrative matters."

"So how did you handle it?"

"The same way I did in his previous review. I told him that he was doing a fine job with patients, that we are glad he joined us--that sort of thing. I told him that he would receive the raise that was promised in his contract. You know, polite and encouraging, but no standing ovation. When he asked about next steps and his development and when he could expect a decision on his partnership status, I just told him to be patient. Nothing specific. And, of course, throughout his time here, it's not as though I or you or anyone else has 'mentored' or 'supervised' Andy. We're too busy for that."

"What's wrong with that?" Amanda asked. "After all, he may not be a star performer, but he's an adult and should be able to read between the lines, particularly when you wouldn't comment on his pending partnership. You basically told him that he was adequate, but that his partnership status was still to be determined. Your actions spoke louder than your words, and you were able to help him preserve his dignity and self-confidence. What more can he ask? And what more do we owe him? We keep buy-in here low because it's important for us to attract new practice members, and the buy-out is also low while compensation during the time at PPRG is competitive. It's up to the new recruit to find his or her way around the place, help build the practice and participate in its committees and activities, and

read the tea leaves; and then it's up to us on the PPRG executive committee to decide who is partnership material. You and I did it that way."

"You're right," John sighed. "We need someone with his particular fellowship training. Despite his, well, mediocre practice building abilities, Andrew appears to be a good person. Besides, if he leaves, it's a buyer's market at this point and it shouldn't be that difficult to find someone with a similar skill set. In fact, current market conditions might be the best motivator for Andrew."

"Then you did the right thing," Amanda assured him. "As far as I can tell, we're in the minority of radiology practices that even do performance reviews, so we're already doing more. And in reviews, you must think about the organization as well as that individual. I had a similar situation with Greg Mancuso: mediocre performer, good guy, performed adequately on the basics. We let him go last year, and we were able to blame the economy and the conditions in our specialty. He was fortunate to find another job, and there were no lasting hard feelings."

"Thanks, Amanda," said John. "You've made me feel much better. I know that we started this process of performance reviews in order to develop norms and expectations with new members, and so avoid some of the poor people decisions that, once made, are often irreversible. Neither of us wants a practice member who is not carrying his or her weight. But I can't wait for these reviews to be over so that I can get back to my real job."

1. What is going on in this situation? What should be going on? Why?
2. What advice would you give to John Cutler? Amanda Jamieson? PPRG?
3. Would you have handled the Andrew Ross performance conversation differently? How?