SoBran BioScience

Hiring Technical Floaters

IS AN INNOVATIVE WAY TO INCREASE RETENTION

Michelle B. Eckstein, LVT, RLATg
Program Assistant - NIH/NIAID
Bradley Fisher, CMAR, LATg
Director of Government Operations

SOBRANBIOSCIENCE.COM

Published in ALN® Magazine

INTRODUCTION

As a company that provides biomedical research support to government, academic and corporate clients, we face the challenge of maintaining a stable workforce while encouraging promotion from within. To address this challenge we created a technical floater program that provides trained staff, referred to as Program Support Specialists (PSS), throughout all of our facilities.

Faced with shrinking budgets and increasingly diverse job requirements, employers must demonstrate creativity and innovative strategies to attract and retain talented staff.

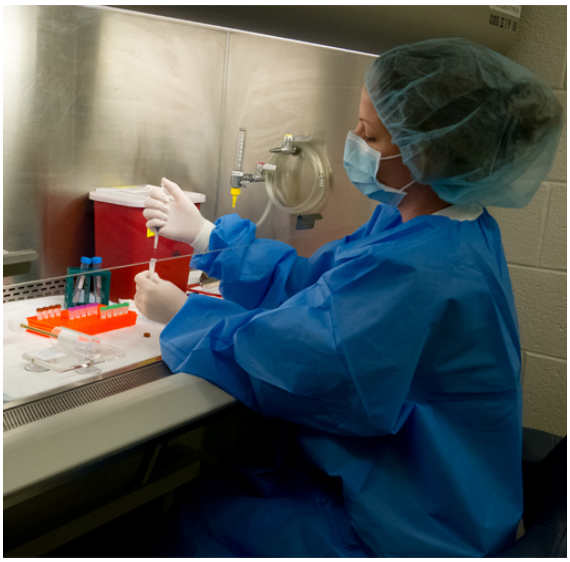
As a company that provides biomedical research support to government, academic and corporate clients, we face the challenge of maintaining a stable workforce while encouraging promotion from within. To address this challenge we created a technical floater program that provides trained staff, referred to as Program Support Specialists (PSS), throughout all of our facilities.

When there is an open position in one of our client engagements, the PSS program allows us to provide immediate operational support with minimal supervision, preventing any lapse in service while we screen for the ideal permanent candidate. Not only does this approach deliver value-added customer service for our clients but it also provides long-term benefits for our company as well as PSS employees.

Table of Contents

FAST TRACK EDUCATION SETS NEW HIRES ON THE RIGHT PATH

While some colleges are starting to provide laboratory animal curriculum, many people still enter the laboratory animal field with very little experience and no familiarity with the industry. Often they aren't aware of the different types of roles that exist and it can be difficult and time consuming for them to gain the skills they need to progress in their career.



A technical floater program is an innovative way to stabilize the workforce and retain talent.

The PSS program provides the opportunity for a new recruit to gain a broad range of hands-on husbandry and technical training in a compressed timetable. They work with different lab animal species in a variety of facilities, while providing essential support for biomedical research.

Currently the PSS program supports both large and small animal species in conventional, barrier, and high containment facilities. Staff are exposed to a wide variety of managerial and training styles while working in positions that vary from cage wash to husbandry at different technical levels. This variety of exposure allows a PSS not only to become familiar with different species and procedures, but also to experience all facets of a facility in a short period of time and see how each specific area fits into the big picture. Ultimately, the employee develops a thorough understanding of how different aspects of the facility depend upon one another.

A MOTIVATED PSS IS AN EFFECTIVE PSS

We screen candidates carefully for the right skills and personality traits to be successful in the PSS program. While this program can provide many advantages for the employee, success is dependent on an individual's level of initiative. A

motivated PSS that is willing to work hard in every assignment, with the drive to learn from each experience, will be more successful and create additional opportunities.

To promote career development for each PSS, management focuses on their individual strengths, interests, and goals and tailors work assignments accordingly. This strategy opens the door to a variety of different career paths and helps each individual determine which one may be the best fit. Since job duties and requirements may change with each research site, and assignments vary according to programmatic needs, each PSS may encounter a slightly different experience.

CROSS-TRAINING BOOSTS THE ABILITY TO LEARN NEW PROCEDURES QUICKLY

Every biomedical research program has high expectations with little room for error. Yet, each research site has a slightly different area of focus, emphasizes specific requirements and has minor variations in standard operation procedures. Additionally, every site has a slightly different workplace culture, each with its own inherent politics and rules, to which a PSS must always adapt as a team player. To perform effectively, a PSS learns to keep eyes and ears open, while asking questions about procedures and the research that is supported.

Typical questions a PSS asks in each new role:

- What specifics are different in this facility?
- What documentation is required and how often should it be documented?
- What type of research is being supported and how is this different?
- How can I use what I have learned to be more efficient?

Asking these questions and carefully listening to the appropriate answers can expand the employee's knowledge base, while allowing the PSS to create connections with colleagues and industry experts. Moving between sites and cross-training in different departments is highly effective at sharpening a

technician's skills, building the proper frame of reference and providing additional depth of understanding relative to the lab animal industry.

A POOL OF TALENT IS READY TO FILL DIVERSE CLIENT REQUIREMENTS

As a company with a wide range of complex contracts, we must be capable of filling innumerable types of support positions, each with distinct job requirements.

The PSS program proves indispensable when there is a need to fill a position quickly with expertise that is difficult to find. In situations such as this, a PSS can be immediately deployed to be trained by other team members or a departing employee, ensuring optimum transition of job responsibilities while preventing any lapse in service to the client.

At times a PSS will develop a strong rapport with a client and prove to be a good fit for a job long term. If this happens, the PSS may be hired to support the position permanently. This strategy can allow a PSS to seamlessly integrate into the position, while decreasing the additional time and cost required to recruit and train a new employee.

Technical floaters can fill a position quickly with expertise that is difficult to find. The client will not see a lapse in support.

CONCLUSION

A technical floater program can be a valuable asset for any company. It provides access to a pool of trained staff on demand, which makes filling client requirements a faster and more effective process.

In addition, the diverse experiences promised by a floater program not only jump start employees in their career, but also make them more likely to stay with their employer as they seek new opportunities for growth. That means less staff turnover and a more stable workforce.

PSS programs such as this one set new entrants to the biomedical industry on a course to become future leaders, armed with a diverse set of experiences and the ability to adapt quickly to new workplace environments.

ABOUT SOBRAN BIOSCIENCE

SoBran BioScience has nearly 20 years of experience supporting complex preclinical research and drug discovery. The team manages animal facilities and provides strategic and technical support for laboratory animal and contract research projects.

Compliance Expertise

With over 500 biomedical professionals, the team has experience in all aspects of *in vivo* research. Staff members are AALAS certified and support GLP research projects. SoBran management is ISO 9001:2008 certified and leads the industry in designing and managing ethical animal care programs that meet the most demanding regulatory standards. In addition to onsite support, SoBran offers AAALAC-accredited facilities with a guaranteed 5-day IACUC review and direct communication with laboratory personnel.

SoBran BioScience clients span government agencies, academic institutions, biotech and pharmaceutical companies, and include long-term engagements with the National Institutes of Health and Walter Reed Army Institute. The company has consistently been listed on the Inc. 500 and Black Enterprise Top 100.

Experienced Leadership

A former Air Force Officer, Amos Otis founded SoBran in 1987 on the Air Force values of integrity, service and excellence. Mr. Otis continues to lead SoBran guided by his commitment to education and training. He serves on the Board of Directors of the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland.

Dr. Gregory Kelly, Senior Vice President of Operations and head of the BioScience Division at SoBran, has conducted scientific research and directed large complex research programs in molecular biology and toxicology for over 30 years. Dr. Kelly serves as Chairman of the Greater Baltimore Council.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

MICHELLE B ECKSTEIN

Michelle has worked in the laboratory animal industry for almost a decade and manages a team of Program Support Specialists within SoBran. She is an LVT, RLATG and has a BS in Animal and Poultry Science from Virginia Tech.

BRADLEY FISHER

Bradley Fisher is the Director of Government Operations for SoBran BioScience and has 20 years of experience in the animal laboratory field with an emphasis in management and training. Brad provides operational oversight, business development, and strategic planning for a multitude of DHHS and DoD biomedical research contracts. He is a Certified Manager of Animal Resources (CMAR), and a Laboratory Animal Technologist (LATG). In addition to membership in AALAS, ICPM and LAMA, he has served as NCAB AALAS Awards Chair and on the NCAB AALAS Seminar Committee.

SHARE THIS WHITE PAPER

Share on Twitter Share on Facebook Share on LinkedIn