

Telegraph, Telephone, Telestaff?

By Jeff Lindsey, MEd, EMT-P

One of the most important things for me is time management (whether it be my personal schedule or that of my staff). When I scheduled units for emergency response or for a special event, the time I spent doing this task would eat up hours I could have spent doing more productive tasks. Even though scheduling took up a

good chunk of my time, I didn't spend up to five hours a day scheduling staff like the battalion chief's aide for the Santa Ana (Calif.) Fire Department used to. That is until his department "employed" an assistant to take over this daily feat.

This assistant had a voice and the ability to schedule personnel in virtually all circumstances. If someone

called in sick, they simply called the assistant. If overtime was needed or a time trade occurred, the assistant handled the issues with the ease of a telephone call. And on top of that, the assistant tracked everything from FLSA issues to who owed who on time swaps. The assistant's name? Telestaff.

Thanks to Principal Decision



Systems International (PDSI), scheduling just got a whole lot easier and less time consuming. Whether you schedule 20 staff members or 5,000, Telestaff is a program you'll want to check out.

Telestaff operates from a dedicated computer terminal connected to phone lines that facilitate the exchange of information. PDSI uses a partnership approach to configure the software for your organization: A PDSI configuration consultant and two representatives from your organization work together to fill in the fields and parameters according to your policies and procedures for scheduling and payroll.

Yes, you read that correctly. The system works according to *your* parameters. *Example:* If your personnel must call in sick at least one hour before the start of their shift or be penalized an hour of pay, Telestaff knows this by the parameters you've established. So if one of your employees calls in sick 30 minutes before shift, Telestaff recognizes this and docks the employee an hour of pay. It also recognizes that you need a paramedic to fill the vacancy and contacts only paramedics to fill it.

Telestaff allows employees to call into the system at any given time of the day, make themselves available for a special event, check how much vacation time they have or find out which station they're working at next.

If you remember the famous Abbott and Costello dialogue,

"Who's on first?" you can relate to scheduling personnel. It's tricky to fill a slot or know where an employee is during a shift. Telestaff knows how to contact all your personnel at any time. If the program is filling tomorrow's overtime shift and Joe is at the top of the list, but is working at Station 2 today for Diane, it knows to call Station 2 to tell Joe he has the overtime shift tomorrow.

In a nutshell, what Telestaff does for your organization is to:

- Ensure implementation of fair, consistent hiring practices;
- Manage internal human resource policies;
- Provide telephone, PC and Internet access to employee calendars;
- Manage a dynamic daily roster of all activities;
- Generate detailed staffing and usage reports;
- Govern scheduling authority with a sophisticated security system;
- Accurately report payroll data;
- Support authorized schedule requests and inquiries from any touch-tone telephone;
- Provide telephone/pager delivery of staffing alarms, notifications, requests to work and general messages;
- Operate with or without a computer network; and
- Support virtually all network protocols.

During the aftermath of Sept. 11, 2001, the daunting task of search and recovery began, and the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation (NFFF) put Telestaff to the test. The program was implemented in

record time and began the scheduling process and tracking of more than 150 NFFF members who provided services ranging from counseling to funeral arrangements for emergency service members and their families. It also provided a tracking mechanism for payroll and expenses for each member.

Telestaff is like having an assistant sitting in your office handling the intricacies of scheduling, payroll and human resources all in one. And the best thing is that it now frees you to do other duties that you couldn't accomplish in the past. It's not cheap, but the service Telestaff provides is worth its weight in gold. It's available as software only or as a "turnkey" hardware/software solution.

There's not enough space in this column to fully describe the power behind this program, so when you're finished reading this, request a demo CD from PDSI. If you really want to be awed, schedule an Internet demo session. It takes about an hour and will wow your staff.

For more information, contact Telestaff at 800/850-7374, via e-mail at products@pdsi-software.com or online at www.pdsi-software.com.

Jeffrey Lindsey, MEd, EMT-P, is executive officer for Estero (Fla.) Fire Rescue. He has more than 20 years' experience in EMS, fire and rescue, holds a master's degree in instructional technology and is currently working on his PhD in the same specialty. Contact Lindsey via e-mail at jtindsey1@aol.com.

