



marketing minute

Happy Employees Can Do Great Things Helping your employees feel needed is key to their success...and yours. Motivating your employees to do their best can make all the difference in the success of your practice.

BY JULIE K. SILVER, MD



“Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” So begins Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*. And so it goes for companies, say Charles O’Reilly and Jeffrey Pfeffer in their book, *Hidden Value—How Great Companies Achieve Extraordinary Results with Ordinary People*.

So it goes for medical practices as well. Successful medical practices work because they have ordinary employees who are able to achieve extraordinary results. But how?

The need to be needed
Mother Teresa once said that one of the greatest diseases was to be nobody to anybody. All of us strive to make our mark on the world and want to feel that our lives are worthwhile. The work we do is a critical component of our legacy. If we believe that our work has meaning and that we are valued for what we do, this encourages us to re-

main involved and to seek the next level of achievement. Even workers at the lowest level want to be valued members of the work force.

Tom Terez, the author of *22 Keys to Creating a Meaningful Workplace*, has given this a lot of thought. Terez notes that two of the critical keys to success are the practice’s mission—“valuing what we do at

work,” and the people—“who does it.” Terez says, “If you have a productive office where you neglect the people, the long term health of that office is not very good.” And vice versa. On the other hand, he goes on to say that, “Some of the workplaces I have seen are so pleasant that it hardly looks like work. In these settings, the mission is lost.” The trick is to balance both the health-care mission with caring for the people who carry out that mission. Accomplishing this will make any practice a success.

One of the ways Terez suggests doing this is to ask employees how they can make a

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MARKETING MINUTE

Continued from previous page

difference. He recommends that doctors “gather folks together and get off the hamster wheel of daily tasks and ask them.” Terez says that by doing this, “You can unveil some really rich stuff.” For example, in a focus group of employees you can ask open-ended questions such as “How can we provide patients with better services?” Or you can ask for specific suggestions such as how you can improve scheduling or the check-in process or what physical improvements you can make to the office.

Rewards

Bob Nelson is a soft spoken but dynamic man who has spent a lot of time in the medical setting trying to improve workplace environments. He has written a number of books including the recently released, *Please Don't Just Do What I Tell You! Do What Needs to Be Done*. Nelson is one of those people you can talk to all day and still want to hear more—he tells story after story illustrating what we as health-care providers need to do to complete our mission and nurture our co-workers. The interview starts with an important observation: “You will never have employees treat a patient better than they are being treated themselves.”

Obviously we need to treat our employees well, but what exactly can we do to turn these ordinary people into extraordinary achievers? If you want some great ideas, just read Nelson's *1001 Ways to Reward Employees*. One of Nelson's primary premises is to reward employees individually. Nelson believes that “rewards” such as holiday parties or birthday cards for employees are not rewards at all, since everyone participates or receives one. Group functions such as a pizza party can be a good way to build morale, however, and Nelson

encourages this approach as well as individual rewards.

In order to make individual rewards work for you, Nelson suggests the following: 1) Tie rewards to needs; 2) Ensure the rewards are fair; 3) Make sure the timing is proper; 4) Talk up the value of rewards (enthusiasm from supervisors increases the perceived value of the rewards); 5) Don't camouflage rewards by squeezing them in among dozens of other topics; 6) Present rewards in a public forum; and, 7) Don't oversell rewards (promote them, but if you oversell them, they start to lose their meaning).

Rewards that result in increased employee motivation are given to individuals based on their performance and strengths. For example, individual rewards might be given for attendance, doing a task repeatedly without errors, or completing some type of training. Nelson also suggests creating an ABCD (Above and Beyond the Call of Duty) award for employees who “exceed the requirements of their jobs.”

The rewards themselves can be creative such as hiring a housekeeping company to clean the employee's home for a period of time or paying an employee's mortgage or parking expenses for a month. More traditional, but still well received, rewards include gift certificates or tickets to a sporting, musical, or cultural event.

Another way to build “anticipation and momentum” according to Nelson is to “couple the reward in a contest of some sort.” For example, Remington Products, Inc., held a contest for their employees with the theme “What Makes Remington Good.” One employee won a trip to Acapulco by submitting a poem about what makes Remington a top company. Another

idea is to hold a raffle where employees get to enter their names repeatedly each time they achieve certain goals. Nelson writes that contests work well when: 1) They promote the program and its purpose; 2) They have realistic, achievable, and measurable goals; 3) The time period is short; 4) The rules are uncomplicated; 5) The prizes are desirable; 6) The rewards are linked directly to performance; and 7) The rewards are given promptly.

Happy staff, happy patients

Obviously the goal in motivating employees is to make your practice a pleasant and efficient place where patients feel comfortable and are inclined to refer their family and friends. Motivating and rewarding employees automatically leads to a friendlier work environment with increased employee satisfaction. Those satisfied, pleasant employees are a critical part of success in the health-care marketplace.

It just makes sense that providing a meaningful work environment where people feel valued will result in a more successful practice. Author Alexander Hiam writes in his book, *Motivating and Rewarding Employees—New and Better Ways to Inspire Your People*, that supervisors really should care about their employees' feelings. He writes, “You aren't an engineer running a machine, you are a person trying to get other people to perform up to their potential.” Hiam notes that bosses often fail to realize that they have “a surprisingly large impact on how [their] employees feel” and that how the employees feel “has a surprisingly large impact on how they perform.” And when employees perform well, the medical practice will

MARKETING MINUTE

Continued from previous page

reap the benefits. ■

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