



BY JUDY CAPKO

Make Employees Great

If you nurture and support your employees, they can achieve greatness.

NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE value of staff! How great you are is a reflection of the people you employ and how you treat them. Here are some simple steps you can take to develop great employees!

Hire right

The most common hiring mistakes people make are selecting the wrong candidate and not giving the new employee the support he needs to succeed. Everyone wins when you do it right.

Begin your quest to hire the right employee with the job description (JD) for the departing staffer. To ensure it reflects how the position currently functions in your office, review it with the departing employee and determine if revisions are needed.

Once the JD is finalized, use it as the criteria to objectively evaluate résumés that come across your desk and determine which applicants you may want

to consider for the position. This, combined with the opinions gathered through the telephone screening, the interview process, and checking references, will improve your odds of selecting the best candidate.

Once you've made a hiring decision, take time to develop an orientation and training plan for the new employee. It should include:

- Preparing the first day's orientation schedule
- Determining what steps will be taken to make the new employee feel welcome
- Developing a training schedule outlining the training method and objectives for each of the first four to six weeks, based on the JD

- Selecting an official trainer
- Deciding how informal feedback will be given and received, i.e. morning brief

- Scheduling a 30-day progress discussion and a 90-day performance review

Give these important decisions careful consideration to ensure your expectations are realistic and that you are properly prepared to give the new employee additional support if needed. Once you have developed the plan, review it with the assigned trainer.

Before the new hire is on the job, designate her work space and make sure it is cleared of the previous employee's items. Provide a list of the physicians and employees that includes each individual's job title and telephone extension. A token welcome gift at her desk is a thoughtful way to make your newest employee feel special—a small investment that will pay big dividends.

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A good start

When the new hire arrives on the first day, introduce her to everyone on the practice team. This includes each doctor and staff member. Those doctors and staff members who may not be in the office should take the initiative to introduce themselves to the new employee the first time they intersect. This will help the employee feel valued and foster a sense of belonging.

During the first month, the manager should meet with the trainer and the new employee weekly for a briefing to discuss her progress. This is vital to getting the employee off to a good start, keeping her informed, building her confidence, communicating your needs, and letting her know how she is progressing.

Continue to provide guidance during the initial 90-day period, ending it with a formal job appraisal so she clearly understands your expectations—where she excels and where she needs to strengthen her skills. Her confidence in herself and yours in her will be far greater. She will be set up to succeed!

The poor performer

Once an employee is integrated into the staff, your goal is to keep everyone working well together and doing what is expected. However, even with the best of intentions, there are occasions when an employee's performance slips or there is a change in attitude. It's your job to create an opportunity to improve, but hold the staffer to your high standards. Even if he has the skills you need, if he isn't committed or simply isn't a good fit, it's best to deal with it as soon as possible. One employee's poor performance impedes the productivity of others. If it's an "attitude," it

can poison the well. Other staff members' attitudes will quickly deteriorate, resulting in plummeting overall staff morale—a costly price for tolerating inferior performance.

Begin the formal process of resolution. First comes the verbal warning: Outline the unacceptable actions and determine how they must be corrected. Following this, if the employee does not meet the performance criteria you established, proceed to a formal write-up and disciplinary action. This means letting him know the seriousness of his actions and the consequence if the situation is not resolved. Set a time frame for resolution and follow up by holding him accountable. This is difficult, because if he does not hit the improvement mark, you must proceed to the third and final action—termination.

Too often, physicians and the manager warn the employee, but fail to follow up with termination when the problem goes unresolved. When this happens, you give the employee permission to continue his offending actions. It is unfair to employees who do their jobs and compromises both morale and productivity. It is your responsibility to create a no-tolerance performance policy when it comes to unacceptable performance.

Great performers

At the core of guiding employees to peak performance is the ability to create a culture that nurtures and values them. When employees have the potential and the right attitude, you can mold them and lead them to greatness.

Start with the simple things that make employees feel valued. Always say 'good morning.' If someone's been out sick, ask how she feels on her return. Don't end the day by walking out

the back door without saying goodbye to those who are left behind. If you strengthen new employees and create a culture that values their contribution, you will be amazed at the results.

It's also important to show appreciation when employees do well. When employees go out of their way to help one another, are willing to work overtime in a pinch, or take extra time with patients, say 'thank you.' Let them know you noticed and that you care. Too often in our busy lives we get absorbed in the moment and fail to do the little things that remind people how much they are valued.

Reward employees when they have gone the extra mile. If you've gone through an EMR conversion that was stressful or relocated to a new facility that required a lot of effort and patience from everyone, celebrate when it's behind you. Perhaps you can have a party or give everyone a set of four tickets to the movies.

Encourage your manager to join professional associations and participate in their activities—at your expense. Membership and meetings fees are reasonable with the Professional Association of Health Care Office Management, www.pahcom.com. And tie a pay increase to his becoming a certified medical manager with PAHCOM. For a larger group, Medical Group Management Association, www.mgma.com, is a good choice. There are other organizations for nurses and coders. When staff members attend professional conferences, they bring valuable information back to the practice and become part of a powerful network of professionals.

Stay in touch

Keep communication open and you

will discover hidden opportunities to nurture the practice team. Managers need to walk the floor and notice when someone is doing something exceptional and comment on it. If a staffer is experiencing a workload he can't handle, dig deeper and help resolve it.

Have regular staff meetings for group discussion and team-building. Let the staff know your vision for the practice over the next year and how everyone can contribute to achieving it. Staff meetings should be organized with a written agenda. Beyond this, it's an opportunity for you to get everybody talking and contributing ideas that improve the whole practice.

Finally, the annual performance appraisal is your time to let the employee shine. This is when you can honor an employee by giving her your full attention. Let her tell you how she feels about the job and her performance. Give praise when appropriate but don't fail to communicate if there are areas where progress is needed. Review the JD as criteria for how well she is doing. Probe to be sure you are in agreement that the JD reflects what is currently expected of the position and whether or not you have provided the support needed to develop a top performer.

Conduct your appraisals when they are due. Failure to do so will imply that neither the review nor the employee is important and can leave staff members feeling discounted and undervalued.

Remember, employees are your number one customers. It's the simple truth. If you create and maintain a culture that supports and fosters this, you will be on your way to having great employees and a great practice. ■

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