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The Search

Tips to attract and retain motivated employees who will help grow your practice.

is On

By Shelley Moench-Kelly, MBA



In this ultra-competitive industry, where patients entrust their looks and their lives to their doctors' care, it is of the utmost importance that practice owners bring in employees who are conscientious, caring and highly motivated. We spoke with industry experts who shared their tactics for attracting, recognizing and retaining topnotch team members. Gone are the days of standard interviews that start with a simple "Tell me about yourself." Welcome to a new era of guerilla networking, social media and unique compensatory tools that help businesses corral the best and the brightest.

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The Search Is On

Advertising the Position

Aaron Feldman, founder of Boca Raton, Florida-based Medical Practice Specialists (medicalpracticespecialists.com)—a firm that assists physicians in planning, designing and managing their practices—says that “Writing a job posting is the same as any writing assignment. When I write the help wanted ad, I’m trying to sell the position to attract qualified candidates who are excited to come to work for us.”

Likewise, Laurie Morgan, a senior consultant with Oxnard, California-based Capko & Company (capko.com)—a consulting firm that specializes in improving medical practice operations and profitability—notes that you can create a job posting with wording that will encourage more motivated employees to self-identify and less ambitious or low-energy candidates to look elsewhere. “Speak clearly about the demands of the job, the pace of your office, the expectations of employees to take initiative and perform at a high level,” she says. Are you able to offer advancement potential, training or other job features that would appeal to motivated, committed, high-energy employees? If so, Morgan advises owners to mention those perks in their job postings. A second tool for identifying motivated employees is via the applicant’s cover letter. “Employees with a genuine interest in your practice are more likely to be engaged and motivated. A generic cover letter indicates that the applicant doesn’t have a specific interest in your position or your practice.”

Focus on the Individual, Not the Experience

Now that you’ve crafted a strong job posting, what are the best venues to publicize the position? Sites such as LinkedIn.com, Careerbuilder.com, Job.com, Simplyhired.com and Craigslist.org are some of today’s most popular job listing locales.

Jennifer Reichel, MD, director of Seattle-based Pacific Dermatology & Cosmetic Center, hired a medical assistant and sterilization technician from Craigslist more than a year ago. The MA was “so good that I sent her to aesthetician training and now she is our aesthetician/MA.” The sterilization tech finished nursing school and is now Dr. Reichel’s



Resumes 101

Aaron Feldman, the founder of Boca Raton, Florida-based Medical Practice Specialists (medicalpracticespecialists.com)—a firm that helps physicians plan, design and manage their offices—offers tips to help practice owners and managers sort through resumes to find the perfect candidate.

Look at work history

What was the candidate’s previous position? Where did he work and for how long? What were his responsibilities? What is his education and training? Red flags include short stints in past or current positions, gaps in work history and whether the person is currently employed or not. “Someone who is currently employed is generally looking to better himself,” says Feldman. “Prospective candidates who are not employed often send resumes to numerous postings, hoping to wrangle something, even though they may not be qualified.”

For Feldman, the following resume mistakes are immediate disqualifiers:

- Resumes that list work history in reverse chronological order. “I want to read your work history current to oldest. I want to know what is most relevant. I don’t care what you did in 1984. Doing it backwards tells me you don’t know how to prioritize.”
- Candidates who send email attachments that read, for example, “Jenny’s Banking Resume,” when Jenny is applying for a receptionist job. That tells me that being a receptionist is not her first love or her first choice.
- Candidates who send their attachments in oddball programs. If you have to spend 10 minutes downloading a program to read it, it’s not going to happen. All resumes should be sent in Microsoft Word.
- If your job posting requires specific requests and the candidate doesn’t fulfill those requests, it indicates that she doesn’t have great attention to detail and can’t follow directions.

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The Search Is On

head cosmetic nurse. She advises practice owners not to shy away from hiring employees who are “green,” noting that if you’re a good leader—or have one on your staff—it can be an advantage to hire someone that you can train entirely. Dr. Reichel relies also on the expertise of her supply representatives, noting that they’re key in finding candidates for “really important positions, such as associates, PAs, ARNPs, management, receptionists and nursing staff—the reps have their ears to the pavement all the time.”

Robert Ruck, executive vice president of sales and marketing at Palo Alto, California-based Sciton (sciton.com), concurs, adding that his recruiting method is threefold: he networks constantly, uses LinkedIn and other social media outlets, and keeps in close contact with traditional recruiters. “I’m not concerned about the industry a person has been in. We’ve hired people with nontraditional backgrounds. But the common thread is that they’ve been successful in whatever they’ve done,” he says. “We can train them.”



Digging Deep To Find the Best

Traditional interview questions tend to focus on a candidate’s background and experience, followed by the open-ended “Tell me about yourself” query. As a result, candidates often have rehearsed answers that may sound good on the surface but often belie faults in their qualifications or character. “It’s always useful to ask open-ended questions that get the candidate talking and revealing her work style, goals and ambitions,” says Morgan. “Always encourage the candidate to ask questions as well—these can be very telling.”

Feldman treats interviews as a “first date,” and encourages candidates to talk about themselves. “They open up and let their guards down,” he says. “Their answers flow more openly, honestly and they speak with candor.”

Ruck uses a similar tactic. He doesn’t use a set list of questions or scenarios. Rather, he tries different topics until he finds one that helps the candidate open up. “Once the candidates feel comfortable, they’ll say some amazing things,” he says. Ruck looks for character attributes first and



Jennifer Reichel, MD, is a Seattle-based dermatologist, and founder and director of the Pacific Dermatology & Cosmetic Center. Dr. Reichel is a faculty member of dermatologic surgery at the University of Washington. She also teaches residents and performs surgery at the Veterans’ Affairs Puget Sound Health Care System Hospital.



Robert Ruck is the executive vice president of sales and marketing at Sciton, a leading developer and supplier of medical aesthetic laser and light-based systems.



Aaron Feldman is the president and founder of Medical Practice Specialists, a consultancy that specializes in medical aesthetic practice management. Feldman is also a co-founder of the Foundation for Hair Restoration and Plastic Surgery and advisory board member for the Association of Medical Ethics.

Laurie Morgan is a senior consultant with Capko & Company, a medical practice and practice management consulting company. Morgan has an MBA from Stanford University and BA from Brown University as well as 20 years experience as a general business consultant.

foremost, such as a candidate’s work ethic, humility, integrity and respect for others, noting that while professional expertise is something that can be learned, “People either have these character traits inherently, or they don’t. You can’t train a person to have them.”

Dr. Reichel adds, “It’s hard to know at a sit-down interview whether or not a candidate is going to be a good fit.” In her practice, select applicants interview with the practice manager, and those who pass muster are invited back for a half-day working interview. Dr. Reichel’s staff is polled about each candidate after the working interview, and each new employee is given a 30-day trial period once hired to assure she possesses the right qualities to succeed in the position.

You're Hired, Now What?

As any hiring manager or boss will attest, finding the right candidate is only half the battle. Providing a challenging work environment where growth is fostered is key to employee retention. Morgan notes that motivated employees thrive when they have autonomy with their work and are in an environment where their suggestions are heard and their accomplishments recognized, as motivation can wane when people feel unrecognized or unappreciated. She adds that it's important to allow people to build skills that support their long-term goals, provided these skills have some benefit to the practice. Feldman agrees, "Additional training leads to responsibility, and responsibility leads to accountability. If the hire is not up to the task, there need to be consequences. But there are also good consequences [for good work], whether it's a bonus or a raise."

Employee retention is a major factor in keeping a practice running smoothly, and it's high on the list of management challenges. Ruck feels that it's his primary responsibility as a leader to develop his team both personally and professionally. "When a new hire comes in, I don't ever envision him being in the same role for years. I find new ways that he can grow, perhaps by adding new aspects or responsibilities to his job," he says. "We seek to promote from within, and Sciton is very committed to helping its employees grow from within, and they respond well to this practice." He adds that all employees have clear, established performance objectives that are discussed openly throughout the year, and every member of the company has stock options and the ability to exercise those options. "They are a part of the company's success," he says.

Dr. Reichel provides her nursing staff involved in cosmetic procedures with a weekly bonus based on the revenue collected as a "thank you" for working hard and being flexible. It is *not* a bonus to entice her employees to sell procedures. "This is clear to them. The biggest motivator is to let my staff know that, without each one of them, we could not run," says Dr. Reichel. "Patient care is the most important thing, and without a happy, cohesive staff, we can't have good patient care. So I remind them of how important they are to me."

Dr. Reichel also allows her staff to receive cosmetic procedures at a greatly reduced cost and conducts a review for every employee after three months of employment, then at the end of each year. "They look forward to it, and it helps to make sure that they know we are looking at them, and out for them. I also do daily feedback and we have a monthly staff meeting," she says.

Hiring and retaining motivated employees is a significant time commitment, but the extra time and effort you take to find just the right person for your practice will pay dividends. So don't just hire a body, the difference will show in both your patients and your practice's long-term success.

Shelley Moench-Kelly, MBA is senior editor of MedEsthetics.