

Don't Be a Loser

Ten ways to improve employee retention at your medical practice.

BY HEATHER PEFFLEY

You just received a resignation email from your receptionist. This is the third undesired employee loss this year. You are already short-staffed, and everyone is multi-tasking. Now, it is back to the recruitment drawing board, followed by yet another round of interviews and, lastly, onboarding and training. Your frustration mounts as you prepare your job listing for Indeed.com. Is there a way to stop the bleeding?

TIPS TO CONTROL TURNOVER

Fortunately for your practice, a majority of employee turnover can be controlled by *you*, the manager. When asked, most employees tell their employer that they are leaving a manager, and not the job. Keeping your most talented employees starts with understanding why they leave. Exit interviews can provide a peek inside the specific issue at the time, and potentially assist with future retention, but a majority of turnover can be circumvented much earlier by following the 10 tips discussed below.

- 1 Define job requirements and salary/benefits package clearly during the job interview. In today's hectic medical practice, job responsibilities can change over time. When interviewing candidates, it is important to provide an accurate description of the job and wages, but just as important is to describe and interview for the skill sets, attitude, and aptitude needed to be a fully contributing addition to the practice. Do not over or under promise job responsibilities or wages. Be as clear and realistic as possible when describing initial responsibilities and potential additions to the role. You might want to consider having the potential employee spend part of a day with a current employee who has insight into the position or role open to the candidate. Whether you chose to have a working interview, the right candidate will be excited by the opportunity to contribute to the practice and motivated by the opportunity for career change and growth.
- 2 Provide a competitive compensation and benefits package. Some employees will leave for another job if they feel they can get more money. Stay close to your employees with regular meetings and reviews. In addition,

Some Employees Have Good Reasons to Leave

Some employees leave for personal reasons. A great career opportunity comes along, they have a baby, they leave the area due to a spouse's job relocation, an unforeseeable personal or family illness is diagnosed, or other life-altering events develop. All you can do in these cases is wish the employee well, host a going away party, send flowers, or identify another expression of gratitude for their time at the practice.

tion, make sure that you stay up to date with current market trends in compensation and benefits packages. There are a number of great resources to stay current on these statistics, including: local and national professional societies, industry magazines, job fairs, and career websites (Payscale.com, Indeed.com, mgma.com, Salary.com, and Livecareer.com).

- 3 Make sure you share the practice vision. You need to share with everyone the relevance of what they do in the practice and how their personal contributions fit into the bigger picture. If staff does not feel they are contributing to the overall mission, they will feel undervalued. In many cases, this feeling ultimately presents itself to your patients and customers in the form of a poor or non-interested attitude, followed by employee departure from the practice. Neither of these will benefit the practice in the short- or long-term.
- 4 Avoid overworking your most valued personnel. It is common to throw more work at the best employees. They are reliable, and you know that they will manage what is thrown at them. However, be cautious here. Prior to throwing yet another task at valued employees, ask if they have the time and/or bandwidth for additional job duties. Frequently, a reliable member of your team will forego personal commitments and obligations to meet the professional demands placed on them. This, however, ultimately leads to individual demotivation and potential employee loss.

- 5 Challenge your employees ... and reward them. Your most talented team members likely are motivated by lofty goals that allow them to stretch their limits. They are engaged, proud, and determined to participate in the overall success and growth of the practice. When they succeed, make sure to provide meaningful recognition and feedback. Lack of recognition may lead to the individual feeling undervalued. Every person is motivated by different types of recognition and management styles. Consider asking each staff member what motivates them (money, time off, verbal recognition) and how they like to be managed. This ensures you are delivering individualized and consequential recognition to each person.
- 6 Create an environment that provides career growth and development. Smart practice owners provide opportunities for career growth and skill set growth. Challenge your best and brightest team members with additional responsibilities, and check in frequently to make sure they are engaged and energized by their role(s). Your employees will appreciate your belief in them, and your practice will benefit as a result of the additional efforts.
- 7 Model trustworthiness. Your most loyal employees will demand that you believe in them and share appropriate information and details. In addition, they will be vigilant in how you treat your patients and vendors. Be a model for honest and truthful business decisions. Social media has placed employers in the limelight. Potential employees are able to research you and your practice on sites like Yelp, your business Facebook page, and other digital sources prior to interviewing for the position. If you model trust and honesty, you will hire and retain your best employees, while deterring individuals who may be more prone to less than honest behavior.
- 8 Provide consistent, frequent, and honest feedback. It is human nature for employees to want feedback about how they are doing. When appropriate, provide employees with on-the-spot feedback, as well as with more formalized feedback through a review process. Employees need to know when they are doing something right and where there are opportunities for improvement. If feedback is withheld, the individual at the very minimum will become stagnant and feel like a boat lost at sea with no direction. In a worst case scenario, this employee will become frustrated and leave the practice.
- 9 Ensure each practice addition is personally qualified and a good fit. In many cases, individuals spend a minimum of 60 percent of their lives at work.

When hiring, it is important to consider how candidates might fit with your practice culture and other staff members. Hiring an individual who doesn't compliment the practice personality will place existing employees (or the new addition) at greater risk of an unexpected or unwanted departure.

- 10 Learn to be a good boss. When hiring, do not act as a friend toward the new team member. Rather, work on your communication, relationship development, and engagement skills. An unhealthy relationship with your employees will expedite their departure process. Micromanagement, lack of trust, poor direction, and feeble feedback are daggers in the life of a practice. If you lack the savvy or patience to be a good manager, commit to getting better—or hire one.

SUCCESS AND GROWTH

In today's struggling US economy, it is surprising that employees would leave for other employment opportunities. The reality is that it happens all too frequently. It is important to understand, however, that you can proactively impact the amount of unwanted turnover you suffer. The ten steps outlined in this article are designed to assist you in decreasing employee turnover rates, while potentially increasing employee motivation and engagement levels. Ultimately, this can lead to the success and growth of your medical practice. ■

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