Employee turnover (i.e., recruitment fees, staff coverage, prolonged inefficiencies, onboarding and training time, etc.) can be very costly to your practice financially and culturally. In fact, it can cripple a small business, including an otherwise well-run medical practice. Building and keeping a dedicated and knowledgeable professional staff is essential if you want to deliver a high level of patient satisfaction to discerning medical clientele. This article outlines several important factors that directly impact long-term employee satisfaction and retention and provides steps to take to help your practice maintain a happy and motivated staff.

**TIPS FOR SUCCESS**

Employees often represent a practice’s greatest cost and greatest asset. If protecting that asset is important to you, follow these proven tips to satisfy and ultimately retain your staff:

**Hire the right people.** Every new employee will impact the culture and work environment in your practice, so be sure the impact is positive and in line with the environment you want to create. It is critical to have a process in place that allows for the recruitment and selection of the best possible candidates. During the recruitment process, focus on the behaviors and values you want in your employees, rather than just on the specific skills and job experience they bring. Write your employment ads and interview questions in ways that help identify those intangible skills in each potential candidate.

**Provide clear job descriptions.** People perform best when they know what to expect, so make sure to have an accurate job description for each practice role. When expectations for all employees are crystal clear, employees have a better chance of succeeding in their role. Make time to write detailed job descriptions that are in line with the practice’s overall daily task list and goals. This type of detail and insight provides employees a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and how they impact overall practice success.

**Afford opportunities and resources for training and development.** Nothing frustrates new hires more than feeling unprepared due to a lack of specific position training or resources by their employer. In order to satisfy your employees and ensure that they are the best they can be, provide meaningful avenues for staff development (i.e., formal on-the-job training and education from senior employees and management, invite vendors to educate staff on products and services, or bring in outside consultants). In addition, offer more extensive online or offsite continuing education opportunities for employees who show potential for taking on additional practice responsibilities.

**Conduct regular performance reviews.** Don’t keep your employees in the dark on how they are doing in the workplace. Performance reviews should be conducted at least once a year, focusing on each employee’s progress toward goals that are based on his or her specific job description. Identify areas of progress and opportunity for each employee and provide a relative score for each individual goal.

**DO THIS NOW**

Survey your employees on a regular basis. Solicit anonymous feedback to find out what your employees like about your practice and areas for potential improvement. Use this feedback to target appropriate changes that make your practice more employee-centric. Allowing employees to have input and affect change creates a strong culture of empowerment and ownership among the team.
Focus your scores on specific behaviors demonstrated and tasks performed, and provide concrete examples that you have documented throughout the review period.

**Offer opportunities for advancement and self-improvement.** Not being provided with opportunities to learn and grow is one of the main reasons employees give for leaving a job. Motivated individuals want to know that there are opportunities for raises and promotions if they perform at a high level in their current role. Be sure to include succession planning and career pathing opportunities to help employees understand what might be possible in their future. In addition, you can offer different job-description levels within each position or role that more senior employees can work toward should they desire to stay in their current role long term (i.e., a technician becoming a senior technician with a new title, increased salary, and more responsibility).

**Use individual development plans.** An individual development plan (IDP) should be created jointly by each employee and their direct manager. The IDP should identify specific areas of opportunity, the specific actions the employee can take to improve each area, and the specific time frame in which the actions should be completed. Using a formal IDP to set goals and monitor progress over time gives employees a path toward success and personal development. An investment in the IDP process shows employees you value them and want them to succeed.

**Reward and recognize your employees appropriately.** Acknowledging employees for their hard work and effort is important to keeping them onboard. Have a system in place to show your appreciation for employees who reach their goals, take on additional responsibilities, or put forth extra, unsolicited effort. Sometimes, simply telling someone that you appreciate their work can go a long way. While it is important to verbally commend employees for successes on a regular basis, providing financial rewards and awards in a public presentation is great, too.

**Offer competitive levels of compensation and benefits.** Money usually isn’t the first reason why people leave their job, but it can factor into their decision. Competitive pay scales and comprehensive benefits packages show employees (and potential candidates) that you value them and are willing to invest in their long-term success. They also show that you are serious about the long-term success of your practice. Use a total compensation summary (which includes salary, medical insurance assistance paid by the practice, dental insurance, life insurance, etc.) to quantify all employee benefits beyond just pay, which will make team members less likely to change jobs for slightly more money.

**Survey your employees on a regular basis.** Gathering steady feedback from employees is an impactful way to pre-empt departures. It is important to solicit anonymous feedback from your employees about what they like about your company and areas of potential improvement. Use this feedback to target appropriate changes that make your practice more employee-centric. Allowing your employees to have input and affect change creates a strong culture of empowerment and ownership among the team.

**Create a great culture.** Your practice culture is created every single day by you and your employees. When your practice is people-focused, it allows for every employee to clearly understand their contributions in terms of practice success. Great employees will appreciate a culture of appropriate accountability and proper recognition. Do not leave culture development to chance; be proactive and put organized, thoughtful processes in place that help build and maintain a positive work culture.

**Conduct exit interviews.** Should an employee decide to leave (it does happen), view it as a learning opportunity. If appropriate, make time to conduct an exit interview to get candid feedback from the departing employee about what worked and did not work. It is important to understand that there will always be things about your practice that you cannot change due to employment laws or other regulations. However, there are times when small changes can have a huge impact in terms of employee retention. Remember some turnover is inevitable, and no company is perfect.

**CREATING LASTING SUCCESS**

Enduring employee satisfaction and long-term employee retention only happens if you invest the time necessary to create processes that work for your practice and employees. Finding the critical balance between accountability and recognition will go a long way toward achieving your goals. By following the tips above you will be putting your practice and employees on a path to long-term success.

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