

Know-How

Expanding knowledge for the
practice administrator

Keeping 'em happy

Nine tips for encouraging employees

Motivating your employees to do their jobs well and help you achieve the practice's goals and priorities is an ongoing responsibility. If you do it successfully, your employees will exceed job performance expectations, work as a team and help you achieve excellence in care and service to patients.

Here are nine tips for encouraging your employees.

1. Clarify reporting relationships and job responsibilities

Medical practices often have casual organizational structures and delegate responsibilities informally. Promotions may arise from

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longevity of service rather than ability. Perhaps job descriptions are outdated. Such things can demotivate employees. Consider:

- Listing project priorities for your practice that aren't receiving attention because you're working around hesitant or unqualified staff. Then list options, such as reassigning the project to another employee or outsourcing it;
- Drawing both an organization chart and a workflow diagram of your practice. If they don't support each other, make some changes; and
- Listing employees with ambiguous reporting relationships and reorganizing them.

2. Foster a team approach

If you want your employees to work well together, set an example. Be a strong and visible role model for collaboration.

3. Establish a formal performance evaluation system and implement it fairly

Employees like to know where they stand. Take the time to develop and implement a formal performance evaluation system that includes:

- Employee goals;
- Assessments of substantive accomplishments and behaviors, such as interpersonal skills, professional composure and ability to make decisions;
- Peer feedback (optional);
- Numerical rating of assessments and peer feedback;
- Goals and priorities; and
- Support needed from your practice.

4. Support continuing education for your employees

As administrator, you know how challenging it is to keep up with changing laws and regulations, reimbursement, daily operations and other practice demands. Your employees are no different. Help them grow professionally and personally by supporting continuing education.

Continuing education may relate to an employee's professional specialty or to your entire practice. For example, nurses and other clinical staff must comply with the requirements of their particular licensing boards, but everyone needs to understand

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customer service, disaster planning and time management.

5. Recognize and reward initiative

Look for ways to recognize and reward resourcefulness. Your gesture needs to be meaningful, not necessarily grand. A practice with limited on-site parking rewards its employee of the week with a parking space near the door. Another group gives movie passes, gift cards and similar prizes.

Consider rewarding entire teams, too.

If your practice advocates volunteer participation in community activities, ask employees to represent the group at various events and allow them the time.

Profit-sharing is one way to celebrate team effort.

6. Incorporate volunteerism

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7. Regularly review employee benefits

Your current benefits package may be suitable for some employees and less appropriate for others. Regularly ask staff for suggestions for benefits, and consider help from benefits specialists. Think about:

- Job-sharing;
- Child-care assistance;

- Elder-care referral;
- Flexible scheduling;
- Benefits package for domestic partners;
- Health club discount; and
- On-site concierge to pick up children and pets, deliver dry-cleaning and laundry, and do other errands.

If you are contemplating a change in your benefits, research options carefully.

8. Hold regular staff meetings and give employees an opportunity to contribute to your practice

Actively engaging employees can make staff meetings anticipated events. An orthopedic surgery group's employees share responsibility for setting agendas and running the meetings. A highlight of each meeting is recognition of an outstanding employee of the week as chosen by peers.

9. Have some fun

A light touch can go a long way in motivating your employees. Celebrate occasions such as birthdays and anniversaries by holding short monthly parties. Acknowledge important holidays, making sure to recognize the diversity of your workforce and patient population. Consider allowing employees to dress up on holidays such as Halloween or Valentine's Day.

Celebrate change. Leaders at a medical specialty practice that introduced electronic health records knew that the day they switched to the automated system would be stressful for both staff and patients. Rather than apologize for the inconvenience, the practice turned the day into a celebration. Balloons, food and emphasis on the enhancements to patient care turned the day into a positive one that everyone remembered. 🌐