

# Managing Employees

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Physicians need to develop effective management skills to ensure the success of their employees. A practice can boast the best products and procedures in the world, but without an enthusiastic and supportive staff, the practice ultimately will not be successful. This article will present 6 key pearls in the effective management of employees that physicians and managers can implement to build a successful and productive practice.

## Coaching Your Employees

Every team needs a coach. If you ever played a sport in school, you probably remember that your coach rallied the team, designated positions for players, and ultimately laid out how each play would unfold. Your coach was the one with the game plan, and the success of your team relied on his/her ability to lead a group effort.

In most medical practices, the office manager or supervising physician is the coach, and the same team management techniques apply when working with staff members and employees. The manager has the game plan or vision for how the practice should operate, and it is up to him/her to communicate with employees to see that the “plays” are run properly and effectively.

Coaching truly is an art form, and there are several key elements to remember when applying these techniques within a medical practice. Keep in mind that a coach’s job never ends. As the office manager, it is important to keep the lines of communication open and be receptive to feedback from the staff. Ask employees if they are facing any challenges, and always maintain a positive and

supportive attitude. The manager’s job is to learn what works best for each employee and to implement those strategies within the practice. For instance, some employees might learn best from one-on-one meetings, while others might prefer role-playing. Be observant and determine which approach works best for each employee as well as each department within the practice.

## Training Your Employees

Comprehensive training is vital to a successful practice, especially when a new employee joins the team. To ensure the success of a new hire, start by welcoming him/her to your practice and giving a tour of the office on the first day. Human resources also should conduct an orientation on the employee’s first day to further integrate him/her into the work environment. It also is beneficial to assign a colleague from the same department who the new hire can shadow for the remainder of the day. Even though the employee may be working with another colleague, it is important for the manager or supervising physician to remain present and available. Continue to check up on him/her throughout the day and address any concerns or questions. After countless hours and resources spent to guarantee that you choose the right candidate for a position, remember that your efforts cannot stop after the hiring process is completed. Emphasize open communication with new hires to ensure that they are satisfied and properly trained.

The old adage about first impressions holds especially true in the workplace: You only get one chance, and if the new hire has a positive experience on his/her first day, a solid foundation for success as a member of your staff will be built. Ultimately, more training and structure for new employees is better. Offering continuous opportunities for growth and training after new hire orientation is equally as important. Ongoing professional development not only ensures that employees are equipped to do their job but also provides your staff with opportunities for improvement and advancement. The first day is important, but so is every day that follows.

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# PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

## Letting Employees Be Independent

Micromanaging is not conducive to a positive work environment and can stifle the creativity of your staff. If you hire someone to do a job, why not let him/her do it? Employees who are trusted to work independently, with the confidence of management, will be more motivated and productive, and they are more likely to stay with the practice for a longer period of time. When employees can take responsibility for their own work, they tend to use more of their skills and are ultimately happier in their jobs. Employees who feel that they are being micromanaged and have no freedom to make decisions will not enjoy their work and will probably seek opportunities elsewhere. Employees in a medical practice often spend more time at work than they do at home; therefore, it is important that they are satisfied in their place of employment and feel that they contribute to the success of the practice.

## Creating a Positive Work Environment

Employees who enjoy their jobs typically are willing to go the extra mile for the benefit of the practice. Creating a positive work environment that is both fun and professional will ensure that employees look forward to coming to work. High employee morale will have a positive impact on your practice's bottom line, enabling employees to work harder to accomplish goals.

There are several ways to create a positive atmosphere within your practice. Most importantly, the way you interact and communicate with employees will set the tone for the rest of the office. As the leader, make it a point to socialize with your employees; take a few minutes each day to engage in light, non-work-related conversation to relieve the pressure that often is associated with a stressful work day. Giving your staff the opportunity to release tension through friendly interaction with colleagues sends the message that employees can have fun on the job, as long as their work gets done. A pleasant work environment usually is associated with successful operations and enhanced productivity.

## Encouraging Employee Professional Growth

Encouraging employees to grow and develop their expertise through training opportunities is essential to the success

of your practice. The more opportunities employees have to build their skills within the practice, the longer they are likely to stay on board and the more valuable they are likely to become. Employees also will work harder knowing that the time and effort they invest will be recognized. Training seminars and workshops offer a hands-on approach to building an employee's skills and are good ways to keep your staff up-to-date on the latest products and technologies. It also is effective to establish a productive balance between learning and working by coaching your employees through difficult tasks while also allowing them to complete their work independently. Providing frequent feedback regarding job performance also will facilitate employee growth and will give your staff direction on where their efforts should be focused. You can motivate and challenge employees to grow within their roles in the practice by assigning new responsibilities, which will ensure that they continue to learn and improve both personally and professionally.

## Motivating Your Employees

In addition to setting goals for the practice as a whole, long-term and short-term goals should be assigned to individual employees. When employees have personal goals to meet, they become more productive and are more invested in the job, which ultimately will benefit the practice. Consider developing an incentive program for employees that will encourage them to reach targeted goals (eg, sales goals, department budgets, forecasts). Offer rewards such as gift cards to the movies or a local restaurant to motivate employees for notable achievements, and even hold an occasional party or social gathering to thank productive employees for a job well done. Monetary rewards are not the only ways to motivate employees though; setting goals also can motivate them.

## Summary

By following these key principles, you can create a thriving practice as well as a positive and rewarding work environment for employees. A satisfied and recognized employee guarantees an efficient office environment, fewer turnovers, less overhead, and a healthy environment for all. ■

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