



FOUR PILLARS OF A SUCCESSFUL PRACTICE

4. Motivate your staff

📌 Employees perform optimally when they have a clear sense of mission, feel like part of a team, continue to learn, are welcome to share ideas, and are applauded for their successes

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The success of any medical practice and any marketing program begins and ends with the staff. You can gain new patients, forge excellent relationships with referring physicians, and maintain a plentiful number of existing patients—but if you don't have a staff that is excited, enthusiastic, and knowledgeable when answering the telephone and managing patients, your marketing plan will be ineffective, and you will be disappointed in your practice.

In this article, I review the importance of motivating employees by providing measurable, written goals in the form of a succinct, effective mission statement and policy manual. I also offer practical strategies to inspire your employees by sharing the power, vision, and rewards.



Start with your mission statement

Nearly every successful practice and every successful business has a well-defined vision, mission, goal, or objective. The mission statement should spell out the purpose of the practice and the methods of achieving it. It serves as the road map, providing direction to all members of the staff, doctors included.

The mission statement for my practice is:

We are committed to:

- excellence
- providing the best urologic health care for our patients
- persistent and consistent attention to the little details because they make a big difference.

ON THE WEB

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ILLUSTRATION: PAUL ZWOLAK FOR OBG MANAGEMENT



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Develop a policy manual

Every practice should have a manual that contains its rules and regulations. Ideally, this manual should also serve as a guide for any new or temporary employee who comes to work in the office.

The manual should cover job descriptions, the dress code, hours of operation, the division of office responsibilities, vacation and sick days, and emergency telephone numbers.

In my practice, we summarize our policy manual with this expectation:

Dr. Baum's policy manual statement:

Rule #1— The patient is always right.

Rule #2— If you think the patient is wrong, reread rule #1.

ALL OTHER POLICIES ARE NULL AND VOID.

We post the mission statement in prominent places throughout the office (the reception area and most of the examination rooms, our Web site, and on a large banner in the employee lounge) to remind us and our patients of our dedication to excellent customer service.

Whenever a mistake or problem occurs, the first question we ask each other is, "Did we adhere to the mission statement and the policy statement?" Usually, we discover that we did not. We use the mission statement and the policy statement to refocus us on our number one priority: our patients.

10 low-cost ways to motivate staff

A well-motivated staff creates an effective team environment. Most enlightened businesses have discovered that team management leads to increased output and productivity. Your employees want to be valued as human beings and individuals, not just as workers. The more you include them in the process of running the office, the more invested they become in helping to improve the way it works.

1. Review staff performance regularly

Employees like to know where they stand and how they can improve performance on the job. Motivated staff members appreciate feedback on their progress—or, even, their lack of it. The best way to furnish this important feedback is by conducting periodic performance reviews.

I suggest that you meet with your employees on a scheduled basis every 3 to 4 months. Give each employee a worksheet before the scheduled review (see the box on page 33), and then go over her responses during the review. You can learn a lot about what motivates her during this process.

I always end each performance review on a positive note, by telling the employee how great an asset she is to the practice. I document these meetings in the employee's file.

2. Encourage continuing education

Just as physicians need continuing medical education to stay up to date, your staff members require continuing motivational experiences. Encourage your staff to participate in continuing education courses and support their efforts financially—you'll get a favorable return on your investment.

I suggest that you offer to pay the fees for any seminars and classes your employees take. You may want to suggest courses in computers, social media, marketing, or any other subject area that will help the practice grow and prosper.

To make these educational experiences even more effective, ask employees to share what they have learned with other staff members. This can be done at a staff meeting. Simply ask the employee who attended a seminar or a course to share the information with the rest of the staff by briefly reviewing the course or describing what he learned and how it applies to the practice.

3. Empower your staff

Office management is complicated. Few ObGyns have a thorough understanding of all business aspects of a medical practice. Most successful ObGyns have learned to delegate the responsibility of running the office and



When employees function well as a team, their productivity increases



to empower their employees to take control and assume responsibility for their decisions and actions.

In my practice, I empower any employee to make financial decisions up to a limit of \$200 without consulting me. For instance, if the office needs a new telephone answering machine, I expect my employees to consider which features we need, check the machines that are available, and compare prices at the local electronics outlet, office supply store, and online retailers to find the best machine at the lowest price.

The take-home message: More than ever before, ObGyns should do what we are best trained to do—diagnose and treat diseases. Very few ObGyns are experts on fax machines. Don't waste time on activities that your staff members can do.

4. Promote a positive mental attitude

As Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm." This is also true of the practice of medicine. When the doctor has a positive mental attitude, employees are motivated by the example. When a doctor is easily irritable and carries problems from home to the office and takes her frustration out on the staff, the employees will, in turn, take it out on the patients.

I have an attitude that employees are on stage. The moment they walk in the door in the morning, they have to leave all other problems and concerns behind them. They need to believe that they are responsible for making sure that each patient has a positive experience with the office at every contact point. That includes the telephone, the receptionist who welcomes patients to the practice, the nurse taking the patient into the exam room, the billing clerk who handles the patient's bill, and, yes, the doctor, too! We all contribute to the patient's experience, and we all need to have a positive attitude.

5. Recognize achievement

Nothing is more motivating for an employee than for the doctor to recognize his achievements and accomplishments. When

an employee improves in job performance, tell him directly. You will satisfy that employee's need for self-esteem, improve his confidence, and help him fulfill the need for self-esteem from fellow employees.

6. Show your staff that you care

Your employees need to know that you care about them not just as workers but as individuals with their own personal lives. When one of my employees is sick, or one of her family members is ill, I call her at home to check on her and make sure that she has access to adequate medical care. If someone gets sick in the office, I call another medical office and get the employee seen immediately.

7. Catch your employees doing things right

My philosophy is to praise in public, pan in private. When I catch an employee doing something right, I send a thank-you note to her home address, making sure that it arrives on a Saturday. I hope the employee will show my note to family and friends. I use a specially created card or a "thanks a million" check (a non-negotiable replication of a check that is made out to the employee and says, "Thanks a million," with my name signed at the bottom).

You will be amazed at how appreciative the employee is that you not only recognized her superior service but took the time to put your recognition in writing.

8. Reward your staff for saving money

If a staff member comes up with an idea that saves the practice money, give her a bonus. For example, in my practice, the 15-year-old autoclave broke down. When I tried to get parts, I was informed that the machine is no longer made. The nurse in our office took the autoclave to the hospital's biomedical engineering department, where workers installed a \$30 part that saved me from buying a new \$2,000 machine. The nurse deserved to be rewarded for that, so I gave her a \$50 check on the spot.

I try to motivate my staff not just to earn more money for the practice but to reduce



Don't waste time on responsibilities your employees can handle

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Worksheet for employee performance review

1. What do you like most about working here?

 2. What one or two things would you suggest we improve?
 - working conditions: _____
 - morale: _____
 - teamwork: _____
 3. Where do you want to be professionally?
 - next quarter: _____
 - in 6 months: _____
 - in 1 year: _____
 4. What can I do to help you reach your goals?

 5. What are you going to do to reach your goals?

 6. Any other comments or suggestions?

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expenses, so I pay them when they identify and design money-saving ideas.

9. Involve your employees in decision making

Ask your employees for advice. Then make sure you follow it. Your staff members are on the front line; they want the office routine to go well. Include them in the decision-making process, whether the task is writing a mission statement or policy manual, determining a change in procedures, implementing an electronic health record, or meeting new job candidates. By including them, you make them feel like part of the team.

10. Have fun!

Surprise is the spice of life. Whenever you can provide an unexpected perk for your staff, you can be sure the gesture will be appreciated. For example, during a week in which two of my employees were unable to work (due to vacation and illness), the rest of us had to take up the slack. Despite being

short-handed, we were able to function at regular speed and capacity without affecting the quality of care. I was so impressed by the extra effort that I arranged for a massage therapist to visit our practice at the end of the week and give everyone a 15- to 20-minute massage. It was my way of saying, “Thank you.”

The bottom line

Encourage team spirit. It makes good business sense. When your employees have a personal investment in problem-solving and decision-making, they will go the extra mile for your patients and your practice.

This is the last article in this four-part series on promoting your practice and increasing productivity. I hope you have identified the four pillars of success for your practice—and that I have helped you understand the importance of all four pillars. They represent the strength and stability of a successful ObGyn practice. 📌



To help your employees feel like part of a team, ask them for advice when it is practical. Then make sure you follow their suggestions.