KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR RECRUITING NEW HIRES

Combining human resources and optometry.

BY MARLON MONELYON-DEMERITT, OD, MBA, FAAO

If you have been involved in the hiring processes at an optometry practice, you already know selecting the right individual for an organization is not a straightforward process. When choosing the right person to bring onto your team, it is necessary to ensure that the individual has the technical, task management, and interpersonal skills needed to be successful.[1] However, employers in a tight spot may be inclined to hire individuals immediately because a position has remained unfilled for a long period. When you establish that type of hiring practice, turnover (whether voluntary or involuntary) is more likely. Although hiring the right fit is important, retention is just as significant for the successful performance of the practice. In this article, I discuss a few of the techniques I employ when helping practices source and recruit potential employees.

FINDING JOB CANDIDATES

The two main stages of hiring are sourcing and recruiting.

Sourcing

The identification and engagement of potential candidates through job fairs, social media platforms, search firms, internet job boards, or other resources is what is known as sourcing. How then, do you engage candidates once you have located them? Interacting with potential candidates through LinkedIn has become a common and effective way of sourcing and engaging with them.[2] Certain methods of sourcing are more cost-effective than others, however, and knowing which ones yield better applicants and increase the speed to hire can be very useful.

Recruiting

Recruiting involves evaluating, interviewing, and hiring the best talent. But before embarking on the recruitment of new employees—whether they are associate doctors or office staff—employers should first understand their business and staffing goals, employee value proposition (see *Let Your EVP Determine Ideal Employee Traits*), and the profile characteristics of your ideal employee.

ALIGN STAFFING STRATEGIES WITH BUSINESS GOALS

Ideally, you want to hire an employee who will contribute to

LET YOUR EVP DETERMINE IDEAL EMPLOYEE TRAITS

An employee value proposition (EVP) is a statement that should communicate to potential employees what a practice values. It consists of product, price, place, and promotion and should disclose details about a practice, the salary associated with the job, the practice location or locations, and how the practice is promoted. Lastly, it should detail the characteristics of your ideal employee. Whether an associate doctor or office staff member is being sought after, you should have an idea of the characteristics you want any employee to exhibit to be successful at the job and contribute positively to the practice.

meeting your business goals, but first, it's necessary to define your goals. Do they include seeing more patients, implementing more ancillary testing, expanding your office, providing specialty services, or offering more availability by increasing office hours?

Regarding staffing, are you most concerned with speed, cost, or quality of the candidates? Without knowing your business goals, a useful staffing strategy cannot be executed. For example, if your goal is to increase profits by opening a dry eye service, it would behoove you to consider the characteristics of an ideal employee to help carry out this goal, such as experience treating patients with dry eye.

A practice can employ one of three main staffing strategies when hiring employees (Table), as follows.

The Speed-to-Hire Approach

Taking this approach means hiring employees as quickly as possible, which can be understandable because the longer a position remains vacant, the more costs may be incurred in the form of lost revenue and reduced productivity. However, be mindful that the speed-to-hire approach doesn't usually result in a long-term employee. When practices don't take the time to ensure a candidate is a good fit, this often leads to turnover.

The Cost-per-Hire Approach

When a practice adopts the cost-per-hire approach, the main goal is to keep costs, including labor costs, as low as possible. However, you may not find employees as quickly, and it will be that much harder to compete with other practices due to lower employee salaries. Also, the new employee may not possess the clinical acumen or customer service skills to match your practice culture because you cannot afford to be as selective.

The Quality-of-Hire Approach

This staffing strategy may cost more and take longer, but in the long run, it is generally the best way to locate and hire the right person for the job. For this approach, practice owners and administrators should be on the same page about knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics an employee should have to be successful in your practice and seek to hire the candidate who best embodies them. This may require sifting through many applications and interviewing several candidates, which may take more time. However, the longer waiting period will provide you with an opportunity to locate the employee who best fits the culture of your practice. The goal of this approach is to source and hire a candidate who will be successful, positively contribute to your practice, and minimize turnover.

COMPANY, CULTURAL FIT, AND EMPLOYEE TURNOVER

Before hiring an associate doctor or office staff, evaluate person-job, person-group, and person-organization fit. If any one of these is out of alignment, the applicant is not a good fit for your practice, and employee turnover is more likely to occur.

AT A GLANCE

- Whether hiring an associate doctor or office staff, have an idea of the characteristics you want an employee to exhibit to be successful at the job and contribute positively to the practice.
- Not taking the time to ensure a prospective employee is in alignment with the goals of the organization usually results in turnover.
- It is far more cost-effective to retain a well-trained, happy, and productive employee than it is to find their replacement.

TABLE. Strategic Staffing Approaches

STAFFING STRATEGY	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Speed to hire	Reduces loss of productivity and revenue because spots are filled immediately	Considered a short-term solution, as there is insufficient time to be selective
Cost per hire	If exam fees are low, keeping labor costs low will prevent eroding profits	Offering lower compensation can make it more difficult to remain competitive in the job market
Quality of hire	More likely to help the practice meet performance goals and contribute to long-term solutions	More costly and takes longer to find the ideal employee

How to Evaluate a Good Fit

The fit of a prospective employee can be evaluated in various ways, several of which are discussed here. Practice owners and administrators should understand their practice's talent philosophy and human resource strategy. Are employees considered investments or assets? One would think that having a great employee is considered an asset to the practice. However, if the employee is viewed as merely an asset, rather than an investment, then the main objective becomes filling a vacancy as quickly as possible, which also means limiting the candidate's exposure to the practice.[2] Providing prospective employees with opportunities to learn more about the practice, such as through the website, social media, and in-person visits, can help them understand whether the practice has opportunities for advancing their careers.[2] They can also learn whether the practice offers the specialty services that interest them.

If you are looking for an employee who is committed to improving, learning, growing, and positively contributing to your practice, viewing them as an investment is far more strategic than considering them an asset. When interviewing prospective employees, pay attention to whether they ask about opportunities for career advancement or show interest in the services provided at your practice. During the interview, note whether they ask about attending seminars and continuing education lectures or workshops and if they have a history of helping practices grow their services. Remember: The main objective of evaluating fit is to match a candidate to the practice's image and EVP.[2] Also, be sure to evaluate their responses to questions asked about customer service, teamwork, and collaboration. Ask how well they work under pressure and for examples of how they work in a team and deal with upset patients.

> IF YOUR RECRUITING EFFORTS ARE NOT PROPERLY SHORED UP, TURNOVER CAN BECOME A PERPETUAL COST TO YOUR PRACTICE.

COST CONSIDERATIONS

Hiring costs may include sourcing, recruiting, and screening, while replacement costs are hiring costs plus the loss of productivity and revenue. Onboarding costs include training and time-to-contribution costs, or the money a new employee costs a company while they are training and getting up to speed in their new position.[1] Remember, it is far more cost-effective to retain a well-trained, happy, productive employee than it is to find their replacement.

MAKE THE INVESTMENT

Hiring the right person is the first step, and further development beyond this point is just as important. The practice and the new employee should each benefit from the new relationship. Do not consider hiring an employee unless they have the potential to contribute to the performance of your practice. The more a prospective employee aligns with your goals and practice culture, the more successful they—and your practice—can be. ■

1. Thompson LL. Making the team: a guide for managers. 6th ed. New York, NY: Pearson+; 2018.
2. Philips JM. Strategic staffing. 5th ed. Chicago, IL: SAGE Publications; 2023.

MARLON MONELYON-DEMERITT, OD, MBA, FAAO
- Associate Professor, Nova Southeastern University, Fort Lauderdale, Florida
- dmarlon@nova.edu
- Financial disclosure: Paid Human Resources and Search Consultant (Dr. Marlon Demeritt, OD, MBA, LLC)