

Staff Management: Hiring New Staff Members

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I've often felt that selecting new staff members is like selecting a new puppy from a litter -- they all may look cute and appear to be the same, but which ones grow up to be good bird dogs and which ones grow up to dig up your yard and chew your shoes has more to do with how you train them than how they look.

I get very picky when we search for a new member because I don't want to upset the "family unit" we have already established in our clinic. I feel it's analogous to adopting a foster child because we spend as much time together as I do with my real family.

I have my staff manager interview the first round of applicants, and the second round of candidates are reviewed by the department heads. The finalists are then screened by the doctor before I meet again with the staff manager and department head to discuss the finalists. I want total agreement among all of us before we solicit an offer to anyone since they have to work with the new member as much if not more than I will.

I believe that good staff candidates are few and far between, just as good patients are. Indeed, you do not "find" good staff members as much as "create" them. But one of the best ingredients of a prospective staff member is their own personal experience with chiropractic. Some of my best staff members were former patients, and they knew chiropractic worked. For those staff who weren't former patients, I found they had to be convinced before they experienced their "conversion" to the chiropractic paradigm. The enthusiasm just was not there initially, which can have a great bearing upon their commitment to their job. So look at your patients for prospective staff members before you search elsewhere.

I have been shocked at how dismal the potential employee pool is in our profession. Whereas the medical and dental professions have trained personnel applying for jobs, rarely do we. Few staff members come to us certified as CAs. Most often we have well-meaning, intelligent, yet untrained applicants. They generally have not paid their dues for the CA position -- no college or experience. Applicants applying for a nursing job or dental hygienist position without previous training would simply not be considered for employment, yet inexperienced individuals are the bulk of our applicants.

After we make our selection, new staff members go into a training program that will last from one to two years. The first thing we do is treat them as new patients so they can see just what we do. The idea being, that after a series of adjustments, they will feel better and begin to appreciate chiropractic. They must attend the certified CA course given by our state association; attend some of the professional seminars I attend; read my textbook; read brochures and booklets on chiropractic; listen to tapes; and view our videos. In other words, educate and reveal to the new employee what chiropractic is all about.

In addition, I meet with all staff members on a weekly basis to "practice the practice." I believe untrained staff personnel are potentially very dangerous to a practice, so I work diligently to train them as thoroughly and quickly as possible. I recommend you do the same because it's up to us to

"create" good staff members.

I meet with the new members every week, as I do all staff members. Sometimes I have met with a new receptionist daily to discuss people skills and patient psychology. I hate to turn new employees loose on the public without proper awareness of the problems they're likely to encounter. Proper training and preparation of new staff will give them the confidence and ability to handle most any task confronting them.

I realize it takes a lot of training to build one's professional esteem. An employee that comes to you with high self-esteem is ideal, but not always the case. I attempt to empower my staff with repetitive training sessions and share my experience with management and patient psychology to better understand the complexities of the job. An empowered staff person is a happy one. I recommend you meet and train these new members on a regular basis.

Be patient with your new staff member. We as children grew and matured from proper parenting. As adults our learning must not stop. A good boss must strive to be a good and patient teacher. You cannot count on the employees training themselves. Take an hour each week to meet with each department, and your staff will grow into the productive employees that will make you proud.

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