

Looking for a New CA

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What chiropractic office manager or physician looks forward to interviewing, hiring and training a new staff member? A few people (like myself) do, but the majority do not. It takes time, and it is costly. I wish I could tell you that you will discover the perfect CA for your clinic within a few days of looking for one. I wish I could tell you that if you pray hard enough, that perfect person will walk through your front door, ready to start with you as soon as possible. I wish I could tell you that during your interview process, that one special person will be there.

You know who I'm talking about, don't you? I'm referring to the person who not only has been working as a chiropractic assistant for the last several years (with, of course, another successful clinic), but has been a chiropractic patient since he or she was a small child, and loves the chiropractic profession.

In 10 years of managing and administrating chiropractic offices, I have only once had an "experienced" CA walk through my front door when a staff position was upcoming. My point is that terrific chiropractic assistants are usually created, not found. So, managers and doctors, do not focus your search solely on finding a seasoned chiropractic assistant, but on a person who is computer literate; a competent speller and bookkeeper; bright; enthusiastic; mature; a quick learner; flexible; a self-starter; a good communicator; and lastly, professional in attitude and appearance. Though some of these skills, such as computer knowledge, spelling and mathematics, can be taught, you will not have the time to be a schoolteacher, so begin the process by testing potential CAs on these skills, to make sure this will not be a problem in the future.

I also mentioned character traits. A person is either mature or not. A person is also either a self-starter or not. So, how do you find out if a future chiropractic assistant possesses these traits? I ask for a minimum of two letters of recommendation from past supervisors or employers that must be included with a résumé. With the many different privacy acts, it is becoming more and more difficult to ask former employers the "tough" questions. Usually, all a past employer can give you are the starting and ending dates of employment, and whether the employee would be hired back based on the employment record. That really does not tell you very much, so I always call the personal references, not because I believe they may have something terrible to say about the prospect, but because I can ask how long the acquaintance has known the applicant and about their relationship and the applicant's character, strengths and weaknesses. Lastly, I ask the acquaintance what type of employment he or she believes the applicant would find exciting and challenging.

When you believe you have narrowed down to the final two prospects, ask them if they are still interested in the position. If so, ask them to spend a day observing the clinic. I tell them I would like for them to get a feel for what the true clinic environment is and for what the job would entail. I started doing this because staff members have told me that though they had read and understood the job description before accepting the position, they did not realize the incredible amount of energy it took to be a chiropractic assistant. An individual can have all the skills and character traits mentioned, but may not have or do not want to utilize that energy required every day. Realize that this doesn't make a bad person or prevent hard work. However, if your clinic is "high-energy,"

you need people that are excited to be a part of that energy. Only when you see how a prospect reacts to your environment can you evaluate the individual. At the end of the day, sit down with him or her and ask, "How did it feel being here today?" and listen to the response. Was the person excited about what was seen and heard? Did the person's eyes "sparkle" from the day's experiences? Did the prospect have questions about the day's events or ask you when he or she can start?

On the other hand, be wary of comments such as, "Your office seems very busy. I don't know how you guys handle all of those patients in one day," "I don't like that patients are always asked to pay," or "Why aren't these people seeing a real doctor?"

After you and your clinic's director have made a decision on whom to hire, remember one thing: If the new CA is not what you wanted, do not keep him or her on. You should have a probationary period in your personnel policy that each new employee signs. As long as you let the person go within that period, you should not have any labor law problems. Also, have written evaluations on file to back you up.

When searching for a new chiropractic assistant, take your time; do not make any quick decisions. Remember: Character and positive energy can go a long way, even further than experience.

Until next time, go out and make a difference!

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