

PSP

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PLASTIC SURGERY PRACTICE

Surgeon In the Hood

Jeffrey S. Yager, MD, on creating a community practice that serves the Spanish speakers of New York City

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Arm Your Staff with Answers

Like it or not, your staff is a reflection of you and most likely the best investment you can make. No matter what your brand is or how strong your marketing efforts are, the conversion of new callers and retention of regular patients often relies on your employees.



How do you “rule the roost” while maintaining harmony among a presumably mostly female staff? The answer is simple: turn your staff into a team with clear goals, roles, and responsibilities. Provide them with the necessary tools to thrive and to help each member feel recognized, validated, and empowered.

When in doubt, have your staff answer questions using facts as opposed to opinions. When confronted with a patient looking for a bargain, teach your team to reposition this as an opportunity. They have a chance to provide the patient with “value statements” that help justify cost. Effective explanations can include details of the provider’s training and experience or address quality of care. If your staff can convert just two new fillers patients per week by explaining why your practice is the preferred provider, they can help generate several thousand dollars in annual revenue to the practice.

Most practitioners might mistakenly assume their staff is armed with the right

knowledge or sales training to appropriately answer cost questions. Eliminate the guesswork by giving your staff guidance. Hold a meeting with your team to develop strategies for combating challenging questions. You might discuss how to talk about competitors without getting into a “battle over who is better,” as well as identify appropriate ways to manage challenging patients. By teaching your staff via a collaborative brainstorming session as opposed to thrusting new rules upon them, they will be more likely to adopt these new strategies. If they feel confident in their answers and knowledge, your staff will be more likely to engage in conversations with patients.

Staff attitudes and interaction play a critical role in setting the tone for a patient’s entire visit. One innovative practice held a “staff shadowing day” designed to facilitate an understanding of how important each employee was at creating “a total patient experience.” During this exercise, staff members shadowed a peer and observed a full day of their responsibilities.



The effects of this simple exercise proved an enormous return. The staff stopped seeing their job as a singular part of the practice and instead began appreciating each member’s contributions. The receptionist learned how easy it could be to run behind in clinic, and the PA learned how difficult it is to juggle a

backed-up waiting room of irritated patients. After such an exercise staff members felt validation and respect from their coworkers, who now empathized with the challenges of their jobs.

Each staff member wrote a paragraph explaining what he or she had learned and were rewarded with an extra vacation day. The formal write-up reinforced the benefits of the experience and helped the office identify ways to increase efficiency. After this exercise, the staff had a better appreciation for one another, which resulted in a more energetic and team-like atmosphere.

THE SECRET SHOPPER “SECRET”

Has a consultant ever told you to “secret shop” your practice, or have you tried it on your own? If so, you may have agonized over the dilemma of whether or not to tell your staff of their shortcomings on the phone. Many physicians fear the ramifications of confronting or criticizing a receptionist who is, for example, short or quick to dismiss callers. Instead of having your staff feel as if you are conspiring against them with fake phone calls, encourage them to make secret shopper calls to other practices. Challenge your staff to identify 10 new phone tips by “shopping” aesthetic practices across the country. Have your receptionist provide a written report inclusive of a plan on how they will implement these new phone techniques.

Recognizing employees for hard work can improve



morale and often improves their motivation. It is even more effective and rewarding when that recognition comes from peers. Consider instituting a quarterly or annual award system with categories such as MVP, most punctual, or most cost-conscious. Your staff votes for their peers, and winners are rewarded for their efforts. Rewards don’t have to have financial value and can be as simple as certificates presented during an office meeting.

Your staff can be the source of many stresses, but if led down the right path they can be your strongest assets. The best way to increase productivity and office efficiency is to change the dynamic of your office. Go from an atmosphere of individual staff members working for a paycheck to a collective team working toward the common goal of building your brand and practice. ■

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On the Web!

See also “Perfecting Your Personnel” by Richard J. Crici, EdD, in the July 2005 issue of *PSP*.
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