

## **Building a Winning Team-Part 1**

By Bent Ericksen and Frank Hotchkiss

No management function is more critical than the ability to hire, train and motivate qualified and competent people.

This is the first in a three-part series on professional and progressive personnel practices. The focus of Part 1 is on recruiting. Part 2 will focus on retaining employees, and Part 3 will focus on ending an employment relationship.

Industry consultants have long recognized the value of staff in the success of any practice. How important is good staff? “Unless you can hire good staff, you are not going to make, it’s that simple,” says Bernie Stoltz of Fortune Management.

Good hiring practices will help you:

- Increase recruiting and hiring success
- Identify and attract quality candidates
- Eliminate wasted hours interviewing unqualified candidates
- Decrease training costs
- Improve morale
- Decrease turnover
- Prevent employee problems
- Spot potential problem employees
- Stay out of court
- Avoid potential liability associated with “negligent hiring”
- Improve service and client/patient relations.

Staff turnover can be costly. The average cost of each staff member turnover is between \$10,000 and \$20,000, although in many cases it can be much higher.

### **Job Descriptions**

The process of building a winning team begins with having an accurate, up-to-date job description because it would:

- Help you hire quality staff
- Describe essential duties and desired characteristics
- Keep you in compliance with a number of state and federal laws
- Help prevent charges of discrimination
- Communicate expectations and provide a valuable new-employee orientation resource
- Help set appropriate salary levels
- Help make proper work assignments
- Serve as a basis for performance reviews
- Help prevent wrongful discharge lawsuits
- Communicate “at-will” status

If an employee or a government agency challenges a hiring or employment decision you will be expected to provide a copy of the job description. That's why our Job Descriptions Module is so important, especially in light of the Americans with Disabilities Act provisions related to essential functions.

### **Recruiting**

Once job descriptions are in place, the next step is recruitment. How much skill and experience are you expecting from the new person in each of the areas covered by the job description? Where do good applicants come from?

- Friends and acquaintances of your present staff
- Suppliers
- Vendors
- Schools
- Employment Agencies
- Professional associations
- State Employment Departments
- Patients
- Advertisements in newspapers through an effectively written classified ad
- Internet job placement services

If you place an ad, you want it to generate attention, interest, desire and action. Use words that describe the job in an appealing way, list minimum requirements only, mention benefits that will draw applicants, and use words that portray an attractive business image. Use both day and evening telephone or fax numbers for an immediate response. Requirements to respond to a post office box usually produce a lower response.

### **Screening and Evaluating Applicants**

The primary goal of screening and evaluating is to briefly and quickly qualify applicants and to sustain or increase an interest in the position. Delaying the screening process often leads to losing the most exceptionally qualified applicants. A good screening process starts with the first personal contact with the applicant. Use our Pre-Interview Form #103 to start the information gathering process. Ask questions regarding the applicant's work experience. For those applicants with whom you are favorably impressed, ask them to fill out an application. If this is not possible, you may offer to mail one.

When applicants come in to fill out the application (refer to our Application for Employment form, Form #102), you want to get as much information as possible in order to decide whether to interview. Once completed, review the application to check that all the questions have been answered and that the applicant has signed and dated the form.

### **Interviewing**

The purpose of the structured interview is to confirm and build upon the information you already have. Interviewing effectively and getting all the information you need within the proper and legal boundaries is both a skill and an art. Adhere to all Equal Opportunity Employment Laws and Regulations. Each interviewee should be asked the same, basic, job-related, nondiscriminatory questions. Create a relaxed, stress-free atmosphere where both you and the applicant feel comfortable. Ask open-ended questions. Give pertinent information about the practice. Clearly describe the essential job responsibilities.

A good rule to follow is that the applicant should talk about 75 percent of the time. Most interviews are ineffective because the employer:

- Does most of the talking
- Makes a hasty decision during the first few minutes based on first impressions
- Gives more weight to job-related negatives than to job-related positives
- Spends time on irrelevant topics while what is relevant is neglected.

Immediately after the interview write your comments (use Interview Evaluation Form, #104). Relax and concentrate on your objective assessment of the applicant.

### **Testing**

Recognized psychometric testing modalities can be a valuable tool in the selection process. Test results are designed to reveal talents, attributes or problems that otherwise would go undetected.

As a hiring tool, testing should not be the sole basis for a particular applicant being rejected or selected, but, instead, to assess perceived attributes, character strengths and limitations relevant to the job in question. Care must be taken that the testing is not discriminatory, nor profiles or otherwise targets certain groups or protected classes of prospective employees, and has a direct relationship to the job.

Research indicates that hiring success rates substantially increase when personality and abilities testing are added to traditional methods of screening and selection and from 54% to 75% when job-matching assessments are factored-in. The major advantage of job-match assessments result when an individual's assessment is also compared with a database of "composite profiles" of high achievers in the same type of position. The best way to improve hiring success is to utilize job-matching technology such as our Bent Ericksen & Associates Integrated Performance Management (IPM) instrument for safer, more confident and successful hiring.

### **Skills Assessment**

When applicants are permitted to work as part of a "working Interview," they are considered employees because they are typically paid for their time. Thus, the employer could be considered the applicant's last employer and subject to unemployment claims if the applicant is not hired or a workers' compensation claim is filed.

To avoid these potential problems have the candidate volunteer for a "skills assessment." It is important that the applicant not replace a regular worker. Do not have the applicant stay a full day (we suggest no more than two hours.) Provide applicants with a letter stating that they are volunteering for the skills assessment part of the job interview; do not call it a working interview (see our Personnel Form #108, Skills Assessment Interview Agreement). This form reiterates that they will not be paid for the time and at the end of the session they will be considered for the job, but no promises are being made.

Remember that the applicant cannot be paid for the time, nor must the applicant be led to expect any kind of reward.

### **Checking References**

Checking references is important and can help you reduce or avoid costly hiring mistakes, embezzlement, performance problems, drug or alcohol abuse, excessive workers' comp claims

lawsuits or claims of negligent hiring. You should always make a “good faith effort” to ensure prior work performance is considered in screening applicants.

When checking references use the same format for all reference checks. Ask the same job-related questions. Before initiating a reference check, ask the job applicant to sign a release authorizing their former employer to provide employment-related information (see our Reference Request Form #105).

**Six basic reference checking rules are:**

1. The information is from an authorized source and given to an authorized source.
2. The information must be factual
3. The reference check should be treated in a confidential manner.
4. You should have the applicant’s permission and waiver of legal action in writing.
5. The information must be given without malice or ill will toward a former employee
6. Ask and answer only questions related to the job.

Save information received from former employer(s) in a confidential personnel file if hired. If not hired, store with other completed applications-you may have to justify later why a person was not hired. Document all decisions made during each phase of the recruitment, screening and selection process.

**Background Checks**

In the hiring process, background checks are becoming more important. They can include criminal reports, driving records, social security trace/verification, credit reports, education and professional license verification, workers’ compensation inquiries and/or drug testing.

According to the National Association of Professional Background Screeners, 56% of applicant-supplied information contains one or more significant discrepancies. In another study, it was found that over 36% of employment verifications uncovered inconsistencies from what had been stated on the application and 14% listed false or inconsistent information regarding education.

Often, just the knowledge that a reference check, background check, and/or drug test may be performed discourages applicants with a questionable background from applying. However, to maximize your hiring success, perform a background check such as is available through Bent Ericksen & Associates.

**In Summary**

It is essential that you conscientiously recruit, screen and select new employees. If done correctly, your investment in this stage will be rewarded with the strengthening of your office team.