

# On Hiring Family Members

It's a red-hot topic on employment blogs, and the stories can be eye-opening.

BY LYNN HOMISAK, PRT



**To Our Readers:** *There are no foolish questions. Chances are that if you have a question or concern in your practice, others are experiencing a similar situation. We're here to help. PM [doctor and staff] readers are encouraged to submit questions to lynn@soshms.com which will be printed and answered in this column anonymously.*

## Re: Hiring Family Members

Dear Lynn,

*I'm contemplating hiring a family member. Are there any statistics that reflect the success (or failure) of employing relatives? In your opinion, is this a good idea? I mean, what could possibly go wrong, right?*

Although it's pretty certain that your last question was meant to be funny, others who have followed through with hiring a friend or relative might tell you this is no laughing matter. As you might expect, individual circumstances produce a wide range of outcomes.

Realize that you're not the first person to consider this step, and you won't be the last. If you are serious, however, do yourself (and your family) a favor before agreeing to hire a family member and do your homework. Listen to voices of experience. While there is no success-rate statis-

tics to refer to, this is a top 10 subject from clients and a red hot topic on employment blogs, where those who have "been there, done that" share their whys and wherefores. Their stories can be eye-opening. Although it seems the "don't do its" have an edge

may work for less pay until the practice is financially stable, offering you a savings in benefits (e.g., health insurance).

**Cons:** There may be awkwardness involving salary, privilege, reprimand and, if necessary, dismiss-

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versus the "don't hesitates", one thing they do agree on is that hiring those you know and love is a much harder situation to get out of than into, so use that 20/20 hindsight wisely.

Extract what you need to from the various perspectives you'll hear. Then carefully weigh pros and cons as they relate to your situation. Investigate any potential vulnerabilities and draw your own conclusions. Armed with knowledge and information, your chances of making a practical decision with a desirable outcome will improve. Examples of pros and cons:

**Pros:** Those you know and trust are bound to be more loyal, to have your best interests at heart, and will protect your vested interests. They

al. It may become hard to separate professional from personal frames of mind. Delicate emotions or your relationship with them may lead to (perceived) favoritism or higher expectations over (and by) other staff members—if not now, perhaps down the road.

You obviously want your decision to be a good one—for you, for the person you hire, and ultimately for the practice. Yet, even with the best of intentions, hiring friends or family can turn into a stressful balancing act. If your research leads you to moving forward, ask yourself these questions before making a final commitment to hire:

*Continued on page 52*

## Hiring Family (from page 51)

1) Are you doing the person a favor, or is s(he) doing YOU one?

2) Do you have a clear understanding of WHY you want to hire this individual? Is he/she actually qualified to accomplish the tasks on the written job description (which should be prepared and discussed BEFORE hiring) or are you hiring him/her for convenience and expected savings? In other words, does he/she have what it takes to effectively get the job done?

3) Is this a temporary hire? If so, is this mutually agreed upon?

4) IMPORTANT! Does the individual's personality fit into the culture of your practice?

5) Have you established and do you both agree to certain necessary written rules surrounding your working relationship?

6) Will this person be held to the same policy standards as the other staff or will the personal relationship status enable him/her to occasionally

Remember, a tiger doesn't change its stripes. If you know this individual to be habitually late, a complainer, hot under the collar, manipulative, stubborn, uncooperative, or controlling in real life, it's very likely those personality shortcomings will surface in the workplace. Funny, these behaviors never bothered you before. Now they do. Likewise, if this individual is generally open-minded, always punctual, kind, attention-detailed and reliable, you could be looking at your next superstar.

To be fair, if you do hire a sibling, spouse, in-law, cousin, friend,



to do that effectively, what key areas should I cover during this process?

It's a great question and a great start to taking the management of your staff seriously. Employee evaluations are two-fold. In addition to elevating staff motivation, job satisfaction, learning and growth, they also address repeated mistakes, inconsistencies, and unacceptable behaviors. An employee who slips up deserves and generally wants to be informed promptly in order to correct it—not in a scolding manner, but with the intent to teach and nurture.

In a common templated evaluation form, you will likely find questions that pertain to: job knowledge, technical skills, problem and conflict-solving abilities, work organization and time management, customer service, attitude, dependability, adaptability, initiative, judgment, communication skills, attendance, and professionalism. These forms also usually offer a performance "rating" system ranging, for example, from unsatisfactory to outstanding via a numeric-type scale. To offer the employee a more accurate review, however, these numbers should be aligned to specific examples of objective as well as subjective performance. They rarely are and are often translated as "your opinion vs. mine."

A more comprehensive evaluation is one that is designed to meet the standards as defined in the prac-

*Continued on page 54*

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rise above it? Will special favors and privileges be an expectation?

7) Are you prepared to honestly evaluate his/her performance as an employee?

8) Will you effectively be able to discipline without fear of repercussions?

Here's even more to think about. If you plan to put your hired relative into a management or authority role, it is critical that 1) he/she has management background and skills; 2) employees are clear about whom to report to and whom to take orders from, and 3) you are prepared to intercede if conflict arises (which could mean taking one position over another). Until you are certain these are all doable, contemplate hiring on a trial basis, with no expectations or obligation to him/her to secure permanent employment.

etc., give the same considerations to them as you would any employee and vice versa. Understand that regardless of your connection status outside of the office, your role in the office is that of the "boss". If you foresee that as a potential hazard to your relationship, then the best advice is to proceed with caution. In closing, recognize that there is zero pleasure in firing an employee, let alone a friend or a relative. The latter can make for very uncomfortable family get-togethers!

### Re: Measured Performance

Dear Lynn,

*I'm a new practitioner and about to conduct my very first employee evaluation because I understand it is important that I review employees' progress, praise their successes, and help them improve their shortcomings. In order*

# THE CONSULTANT IS IN

Ratings				
[Our Practice] Employee...	1 = Company expectation REQUIRED	2 = Company expectation ACHIEVED	3 = Company expectation SURPASSED	N/A
<b>A. INTRO AND GENERAL INFORMATION</b>				
1. Can explain our Practice mission statement and philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments				

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tice’s employee manual. What better tool to use to assure that all employees remain in sync with the specific rules and objectives set forth by the practice? These questions cover all bases and are formatted according to each chapter. For example, one criteria that Chapter A: Intro and General Information might evaluate is shown above.

Performance reviews are not about focusing on the past, rather on the future. As such, they should include 1) action plans for employee improvement, 2) necessary tools and guidance for them to succeed and, 3) appropriate follow-up to make sure employees are meeting expected standards.

They should be conducted annually by the Office Manager and/or DPM, preferably at each employee’s work anniversary, with a daily dose of “on-the-spot” corrections (if needed) and compliments (always welcome). Management 101: Always support employee improvement, criticize softly, and praise loudly. **PM**

*PM Readers: For a complimentary copy of SOS’s Performance Review template, please email Lynn at [lynn@soshms.com](mailto:lynn@soshms.com).*



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