



# Effective Tips for the Hiring Process

Choosing the right candidate is essential.

BY TIMOTHY W. BODEN, CMPE

Copyright © 2022 by American Association for Physician Leadership®.

**T**he best-run practices, large or small, always have a team of employees who perform well above average expectations.

When you visit a top-performing medical office, you may find yourself amazed at (and just a bit envious of) its good fortune in finding so many skilled and dedicated workers.

But luck has very little to do with it. Physicians and managers who enjoy the support of cooperative people performing their jobs with excellence have skillfully found and hired the right people to fill each slot. Practice leaders potentially see a great return on their investment of time and energy in the hiring process.

## They Know What They're Looking For

Once upon a time, when profits were (comparatively) easier and cost-control wasn't always at the top of the manager's list, we often saw physicians and managers who tried to solve operational problems by "throwing another body" at the problem. But even then, more people doing the same things seldom solved anything. Today, it will kill your bottom line, too.

Top performers have a keen understanding of their operations and how each team member plays a key role in keeping the machine running smoothly and efficiently. Their practices have clearly defined job descrip-

tions, thorough training plans, and deep resources and tools for their staffers to get the job done.

The best of the best even take it one step further: They know, either personally or through their supervisors, how each department gets along with one another. Some doctors and executives more or less turn up their collective noses at talk about "the softer side" of management. "I have more important things to attend to than that 'touchy-feely' stuff," they say. That may be generally true, but effective people management requires at least some of your time and attention.

opening. He or she knows something about the skills required to do the job, knows how the job functions as a component of practice operations, and knows enough about the team to have an understanding of the personality types that will fit in best.

## Applying That Knowledge to the Screening Process

Few managers truly enjoy searching for qualified applicants to fill a vacancy in the medical office. The time-consuming process forces you to pick your way through legal minefields and avoid any appearance of

## Few managers truly enjoy searching for qualified applicants to fill a vacancy in the medical office.

Within minutes of walking through the door of an office, you can almost always identify whether or not the employees feel like they "fit in"—they know the value of their contributions to the team.

You can see it in their eyes—hear it in their voices. Why, you can almost feel it in the air! And without exception, you can find in these practices doctors and managers who have genuine, personal connections with their staffers. They know each other. They care about each other, and each one feels cared for.

So when it comes to hiring a new staff member, the manager or physician has a pretty good idea of what the practice needs to fill each job

discrimination. It finds you playing strategic games with candidates who may be trying their best to conceal key facts in their backgrounds. And it requires you to track down references who might be reluctant to give you any substantive information. In the end, you take a deep breath and decide to give someone a chance.

No manager bats a thousand at choosing new hires. But if you have invested your time and energy (and a bit of your heart) in understanding your "ideal" candidate, and you apply diligence and skill, you will improve your batting average.

You can use careful position descriptions with explicit minimum

*Continued on page 120*

## Hiring Process (from page 119)

qualifications. You can apply skills testing to narrow your pool of candidates. You can learn how to “read between the lines” when reviewing résumés. You can hone your background-checking and reference-calling methods.

But nothing compares to the personal interview when it comes to recognizing the right person for the job you’re trying to fill. Having an effective discussion (or two) with the applicant will reveal more about “chemistry” and “fit” than you could

well-rehearsed answer for each. More creative questions can help you get past their guard.

Zupko offers several great questions you can use to learn more about your candidate’s character. She has constructed the questions to give insight into the applicant’s grit, tenacity, and curiosity. If you apply them skillfully, you will catch a glimpse of their problem-solving skills and how they deal with failure or adversity.

She recommends opening the interview with a question like, “What have you learned about our prac-

er? Is he or she observant enough to notice problems and bold enough to do something about them?”

## Sound Natural and Conversational

There are more good ideas in Zupko’s presentation (eight questions in all). She suggests exploring failures (“What have you tried ... that didn’t work out [and] what did you learn?”) and testing the candidates’ curiosity and interest in our industry (“What do you read to keep up with the healthcare profession?”).

Just remember to pay attention to your delivery, your body language, and the ambience you develop for each interview. Try to keep your note-taking subtle. Use a guide to prompt you to ask all the important questions, but avoid reading the questions directly from the page.

Here’s a trick from a professional psychologist that proved very effective in helping candidates (and existing employees) feel less defensive when they came to my office. I arranged my office so that my desk faced a wall away from the door. That forced me to have conversations without a big, authoritative desk standing between them and me. We sat face-to-face, somewhat defenseless, and it encouraged openness and more relaxed conversations.

Whatever works for you—from furniture arranging to personal posture and vocal tone—make adjustments to encourage honest exchanges. You will eventually see your hiring choices improving and your staff becoming a more cohesive, more efficient team. **PM**

## Reference

<sup>1</sup> Zupko K. Eight great hiring questions for medical staff. *Physicians Practice Pearls*. June 29, 2016; [www.physicianspractice.com/hiring-firing/8-great-hiring-questions-medical-staff](http://www.physicianspractice.com/hiring-firing/8-great-hiring-questions-medical-staff).

## Remember to pay attention to your delivery, your body language, and the ambience you develop for each interview.

ever discover in any other step of the hiring process. The key word, however, is “effective”; you have to develop skills necessary to make your dialogue meaningful and revealing.

There is definitely an art to effective interviewing. As the hiring manager, it’s up to you to create a non-threatening, comfortable environment conducive to drawing out honesty and openness. Of course, the nature of the hiring process, the fact that the candidate knows he or she is under scrutiny, imposes an elevated level of guardedness. You can only hope to lower the defenses enough get a more accurate impression of the applicant.

## Good Questions from a Seasoned Veteran

I recently came across a succinct online presentation created by long-time practice management consultant Karen Zupko.<sup>1</sup> In it she emphasizes the need to go beyond the standard lines of questioning that focus on skill sets and previous job tasks. You can probably do away with some other “standard” interview questions like, “What is your greatest strength?” or “What is your best character trait?” Of course you need the answers to questions like these, but any experienced applicant has heard these questions many times and probably has a

practice through online resources that interests you in working for us?” Open-ended questions like this encourage conversation. Applicants’ responses to this question reveal whether they’ve done any research. If they try to bluff their way through the answer, you learn something about their honesty.

Another question recommended by Zupko: “Tell me how you’ve taught yourself to use the practice management system, [electronic health record] or another software program at your previous practice.” Interviewees’ responses can reveal something about their grit and tenacity. Few practices have perfect training systems, and the best employees often end up figuring out the best way to use certain system functions. You may also get a sense of the candidate’s attitude—does the person seem bitter about having had to figure it out on his or her own?

Here’s another good one, especially for candidates from the millennial generation: “Tell me about a time when you identified a problem and came up with a way to solve it; or when you succeeded at something by not following the rules.” Millennials like nonconformity, creative thinking, and finding new ways to do things. Is the candidate sitting across from you a creative work-



**Timothy Boden** is a freelance journalist. He can be reached at [tboden@aol.com](mailto:tboden@aol.com).