



# 10 Tips for Finding and Retaining Talent

Here’s how to hire and keep quality employees.

BY MARK TERRY

Challenging and competitive job markets come and go. For sure, the post-COVID-19 period has been a tough one for employers, with increasing wages and plenty of job openings, increasing competition for top talent. That’s been great news for job seekers, but less so for employers hoping to find and retain talent.



Melissa J. Lockwood, DPM, Heartland Foot and Ankle (Bloomington, IL), says, “After being in private practice for 15 years, my answer has definitely changed and will probably continue to change over the course of the next 15 years I’m in practice. I say that

simply because what employees need specifically has been different. But there are some generalities for obtaining and retaining really good team members.”

that the Number 1 reason people left their jobs was “poor pay.”

Lockwood says, “The most important thing that we’ve found in our practice setting has been quality

**“The most important thing that we’ve found in our practice setting has been quality over quantity.”—Lockwood**

Here are 10 tips for keeping and retaining staff.

**1. Competitive salary and benefits.** There is a tendency to shy away from better pay as a motivator, with employers leaning into “it’s not about the money, it’s about belonging, etc.” We’ll get to those factors, but a Pew Research Center study in 2022 found

over quantity. In the sense that we really want to try to have a really good benefits package that helps us meet our goals.”

She adds that you really have to know your numbers and determine where your practice is financially so you “can spend a little bit of money to obtain a really good

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quality candidate that's going to stay for a while. And when I say spend the money, I don't necessarily mean just the salary. Our practice, like most others, has increased the baseline salary almost 30% in the last two-and-a-half years just as a reflection of the pandemic."

Hal Ornstein, DPM, Affiliated Foot & Ankle Center (Howell and Jackson, NJ),



Dr. Ornstein

agrees, noting, "I'm a believer in paying more than your competitors are, because retention, retention, retention."

**2. Appreciation.** Peter Wishnie, DPM, of Family Foot & Ankle Specialists (Piscataway, NJ), says, "People want to feel appreciated. It really starts from day one when you hire them. Sometimes, the bigger you are,

of words on a piece of paper, but something you really believe in." The more employees buy into that sense of mission, and feel they have a role to play in it, the more likely they are to stick around.

**4. Opportunities for growth.** Wishnie says, "People want to have the

honor them, teach them, encourage them," Ornstein says.

**6. Meet as a team.** Going back in many ways to communication, as well as to leadership, Lockwood says, "On a weekly basis we meet as a team to encourage and to focus on what we're doing positive and well as a

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ability to grow into the organization. You're looking for leaders when you hire people who want to grow as the organization grows."

But it's not just a matter of leadership. Although within a typical podiatric medical practice there may be limitations on upward mobility, there are many opportunities for cross-training and finding roles and responsibilities that can increase the

team. We also chat about some things that we could possibly do better next time. Keep that line of communication open as a group on a weekly basis, as well as individually with team members on a monthly basis. I meet with every single team member one time a month for a coaching and accountability session that's one-on-one."

Lockwood notes that with six employees, it's essentially three hours

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you forget about what's really important. And it's really important for people to feel that they are needed and wanted and listened to. So communication is very, very important."

Ornstein adds, when asked what he thought was more important, paying people well or taking care of them, "It's a blend. If you're going to err on one side, it would not be paying an extreme amount, it would be giving them an extreme amount of appreciation."

**3. Part of the mission.** Continuing with the idea of communication, Wishnie said that from day one it's important to communicate "the vision of the organization, where this company is going, what the role of the new hire is in that vision. The mission statement is not just a bunch

staffer's value to the practice while providing opportunities for growth.

**5. Be a leader, not a boss.** There are a lot of aphorisms about the difference between a boss and a leader. A boss manages employees, while a leader inspires them to innovate, be creative, and work toward perfection. Those may be linguistic hair-splitting but it's true that how you lead your team will play a major role in staff loyalty and retention.

"We as doctors own the key to the thermostat that's either going to make the office happy or cloudy or sunny," Ornstein says. "We can control that thermostat. It's the culture that's created."

"But there's a big difference between leading and being a boss. With leading, you support them,



Dr. Wishnie

of the month she spends with them individually. "But it's nipping problems in the bud before they turn into something bigger. They have an outlet with which they can express things because when we're in the clinic, I don't want to hear it. And they know that. When I'm in the clinic, I'm busy. We need to take care of the patients. But it's important to take time for the team away from just being with patients. We have to slow down to speed up."

Ornstein points out that his practice has a "no complaining rule. You can have issues all day long and come approach us, it's an open-door policy. My office team has my cell phone, call me anytime, anything that you need. If you have an issue come up, let's talk about it." But in terms of general complaining or complaining when patients are around, that's undesirable. And it's better to address complaints and criticisms constructively

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and openly, than have them become a negative undertow that affects morale and patient interactions.

**7. Be flexible.** This primarily refers to work/life balance, how you approach scheduling and time off. Lockwood says, “Employees absolutely want options.” One thing she does in her practice is that employees begin accruing their paid time off (PTO) on Day One so they don’t go through a probationary period for PTO accrual.

Another policy Lockwood’s practice instituted was to create a few different times during the week that could be used to take an hour or two off without using PTO. “Just as an example,” Lockwood said, “Tuesday mornings from 8:00 to 10:00 a.m., there’s an opportunity for staff to take flex time where I will pay them, and they can go take their doctor’s appointments. It’s not guaranteed each month that they

would get that particular time but giving them that extra option is an indication that their employer cares about them, supports them, and wants them to be as healthy as possible by making these appointments easier. It’s a really big perk that they very much enjoy.”

a schedule for each person and they keep it that way, that can work. Because constant changes affect the whole organization and if you’re just doing it to help one person, it becomes difficult, particularly in a small office.”

Ornstein added, “If somebody’s

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This also applies to schedules, accommodating individual work schedule preferences as much as possible. Wishnie says, “I don’t mind that as long as there’s stability. When things change on a daily basis, that’s not good for the organization or the people in general. But otherwise, if it’s

kid is having a graduation, someone has a baby, be flexible. Encourage people. Let them have a life. If they have to leave, the office is going to survive.”

He also adds that earlier in his career, everyone worked through lunch.

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Now they make time for it. “Some people are going to read that and say, ‘Well, I don’t have time for that. I’ve got to see patients. I can’t afford that.’ But the question is: How do you retain employees? That’s how you do it.”

**8. Be part of something.** On one hand, this goes back to being part of the mission. To be part of the mission and to share the vision of the practice. But it can also mean a broader vision that extends outside the practice.

Ornstein says that they offer staff an hour or two of paid time off so they can “go volunteer. Go out in the community. Make a difference. We always seem to be collecting for something, whether for soldiers or the homeless. One example is Socks for Docs. We’re collecting socks because socks are the Number one thing that’s needed in homeless shelters. It helps us all feel good.”

Wishnie mentioned a similar idea when discussing the vision of the

ten instructions is a recipe for disaster. Having a playbook and written instructions ensure that everyone’s on the same page.”

In addition, if you expect staff to take on new tasks, make sure there’s appropriate training and support sys-

There are numerous small ways to show appreciation, such as regularly buying pizza for lunch. “Some seems like little silly stuff,” Ornstein says. “I’ll walk around the office and give out a couple of scratch-off lottery tickets. Or we’ll

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**“Sometimes the simplest thing is just a little system we have where if we as a team get a good review, everybody gets a little bead. And when they collect 10 beads, they all can draw from a bag of gift cards that I have.”—Lockwood**

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tems. If there are appropriate opportunities for continuing education or to learn new skills, support those activities.

**10. Mark milestones and offer small incentives.** Marking milestones can be celebrating birthdays and work anniversaries, things of that nature.

take the afternoon off, a couple of hours with pay and go to Applebee’s and just sit around and BS, have some appetizers.”

There is plenty of talk about “treat your staff like family.” Although everyone knows what that means—some level of comfort, kindness and respect—“treat them like family” probably depends a lot on the family. And many strong families have a lot of behavior and bluntness that are unlikely to be appreciated in the workplace. However, it’s important when considering staff, to appreciate that you may be spending more time with them than you do with your own family or them with theirs. Make it a good place for them to be.

Little things add up. Ornstein says he never leaves the office for the day without saying goodbye to everyone. “It’s a community, you know?” he says. “Would you leave your house without saying goodbye to your family?” **PM**

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practice, noting that Millennials and Gen Z “believe in causes, whether it’s the environment or something else, but they want something to believe in. Part of the appeal is to connect it to something that your company believes in as well.”

**9. Provide support and training.** When you hire someone, whether they’re experienced or not, some sort of training and support is required. Wishnie says, “You need a playbook and then you need proper training. Hiring someone, even if they had 20 years of experience at that job, putting her in that position and saying, ‘Go ahead, do your job,’ without writ-

Lockwood notes that in her case, she assigns that to someone within the practice because she’ll get busy and forget. Those milestones can be celebrated with some sort of treat, donuts, a birthday cake, a gift card, whatever.

Lockwood adds that “It’s just showing appreciation for the team themselves. We’ve tried many different ways to incentivize the team, to try to do protocols and training and things like that. Sometimes the simplest thing is just a little system we have where if we as a team get a good review, everybody gets a little bead. And when they collect 10 beads, they all can draw from a bag of gift cards that I have.”



**Mark Terry** is a freelance writer, editor, author and ghostwriter specializing in health-care, medicine and biotechnology. He has written over 700 magazine and trade journal articles, 20 books, and dozens of white papers, market research reports and other materials. For more information, visit his websites: [www.markterrywriter.com](http://www.markterrywriter.com) and [www.markterrybooks.com](http://www.markterrybooks.com).