



# The Match Game

Workers who are suitably paired with a job they love will work better and harder.

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 [soslynn@gmail.com](mailto:soslynn@gmail.com) which will be printed and answered in this column anonymously.

## Topic: The Match Game

Dear Lynn,

I hired a gal to be my front desk receptionist three weeks ago. She answered our Medical Assistant ad and since she took MA courses, I thought she'd be a great candidate. During our interview, however, when she discovered the ad was for a receptionist, she confessed she never really focused

too much on this area of her courses. It wasn't her main interest; patient care was. At the time, she needed a job, and I needed a receptionist, so we both decided to give it a go. I thought she'd catch on, but it was soon apparent that her lack of interest fed her lack of efficiency. My clinical staff were constantly being pulled in to help her instead of doing their own work and mistakes were being made all over. It wasn't long before everyone was stressed out, including me. She ended up leaving and sadly, I'm back in the market for a receptionist. An unexpected setback.

Thank you so much for your email. I'm sorry things didn't turn out as expected. There are a couple issues at play here; the main one you seemed to have already touched

on: this applicant outright told you she would prefer a clinical staffing position.

Generally speaking, the interviewer's responsibility is to drill down the talents, abilities and passions of each applicant during the interview process. What can they bring to the practice? What attributes are needed to fill this position? And are they RIGHT for the open position?

In this case, it seems as if you may have pre-determined that her educational credentials were her most qualifying attribute while dismissing that patient care was her real motivation. A secretarial or receptionist background request in your ad would have been more appropriate. She was misled to believe that the opening would suit her ambitions.

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## Match Game (from page 105)

In order for any applicant to succeed in being an asset to your practice, you must first match their skills, talents, strengths, limits, and personality specific to the job description you are seeking to fill. Then, have an honest conversation with them about the tasks and responsibilities involved and if they indicate a resistance to any of them. And finally, the salary/benefits offered. If you conclude their less than robust interest (yes, ROBUST!) in any part of that conversation—take that as a clear sign that they may not be willing to put 100% into their work.

## The Perfect Matchup (An Elf-Depiction)

If you've ever seen the movie "ELF" (and who hasn't?), you'll recall a scene that takes place in Santa's workshop. All the elves are shown working on toys in an assembly line and whether they're building a train, or an etch-a-sketch, or stuffing a bear, they each perform their specialized craft based on their individual talents, while also whistling, laughing and singing.

Okay, maybe we don't always whistle, laugh and sing at work, but

Buddy was not a poor worker. He was just not properly positioned to succeed as a toy maker.

The same can be true for employees in any occupation. Workers who are suitably paired with a job they love will up their performance, be more enthusiastic, and work better and harder. It's the perfect match-up that helps boost job satisfaction and therefore, employee retention.

Here's a thought that might have resulted in your retaining your mismatched medical assistant after you

him competency, it is suggested that at least once a year a private Skills-Gap-Analysis be scheduled with each staff member, to discuss their current positioning. This can be incorporated into their annual evaluation.

It is the perfect opportunity to ask them:

- Do they enjoy what they are currently doing?
- If they could change their position or job responsibilities in any way, what job would they prefer? And why?

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## It's the perfect match-up that helps boost job satisfaction and therefore, employee retention.

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realized her efforts as a receptionist failed. Have you thought of reorganizing staff?

Maybe there was someone on your clinical staff that would have preferred to step into the open receptionist position, opening up a spot on your medical assistant team. Someone whose excellent organizational skills were not being fully utilized in the back office. Someone who knew the front desk routine well enough to multitask

• How do they describe their primary strengths and weaknesses? Talents?

• Do they feel that these top qualities are being utilized or wasted in their existing job description? Would they be better fulfilled elsewhere in the practice?

• Would they be more *comfortable, happier* doing something altogether different, outside of this practice? What might that be?

There is nothing wrong with repositioning staff, in fact it may come as a welcome surprise to some. Assure them that this conversation is merely an information inquiry—one that focuses on their happiness and job satisfaction.

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## There is nothing wrong with repositioning staff.

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you get the picture. Happy, busy, productive worker-bees.

Then there is "Buddy", the main character. Not only an obvious physical exception, but clearly, the job he was given does not make him a happy elf. He sadly realizes he is not as capable as the others at putting together these toys. As a result of his incompetence and job dissatisfaction, he resents the work resulting in production shortages.

Fast forward. The engine on Santa's sleigh breaks down, giving Buddy the opportunity to put his unique talents to work. Indeed, he had talent, different than all the other elves. When he was asked to repair Santa's sleigh, he jumped into action.

some of the more routine duties. Someone whose warm and welcoming personality was sadly hidden from view by doing less people-focused tasks and more "behind closed doors" functions, such as prepping and cleaning rooms, sterilizing, inventory, etc. Or perhaps someone who was a wiz at the computer and knew the patients well enough to be able to handle the phone and the schedule more effectively would be eager to move into the receptionist's seat. But how would you know unless you asked?

## Skills-Gap-Analysis

To ensure that each staff member is being utilized to their maxi-

## Cross Training Benefits

This newfound knowledge might be the stimulus needed to develop a cross-training program. Think of it as a process that involves introducing staffers to new tasks and accountabilities in the practice through such established techniques as shadowing experienced staffers along with sessions of hands-on training to build confidence.

You may find that some staff will like this temporary position—maybe they won't. However, before totally dismissing the idea, consider that initiating this transitory job positioning is a practical, multi-faceted strat-

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egy where both sides stand to benefit.

- First, it allows for a non-interruptive efficiency flow by assuring there is competent coverage during employee absence (sick or vacationing).

- Second, it reduces overall stress, knowing that in times of crisis, one staff member is capable of stepping in to lend a hand to another.

- Third, it also checks each team member's physical and mental capacities for alternate job placement.

- Fourth, new, exciting challenges can increase their motivation and their desire to come to work.

- And fifth, they will increase their skillset by learning other aspects of the practice operations, making them more resourceful, valued employees.

- Finally (a bonus benefit), they will understand that every employee's job (theirs included) is no more or less important than anyone else's.

At the end of the day, what you have is an EFFICIENT, PRODUCTIVE TEAM. Not a bad combination for success.

### Topic: Company-imposed Employee Policy

Dear Lynn,

*My practice was recently purchased by a company that just hit me with a "policy", prohibiting my staff from working in the office when I am not physically present. Because I am at the hospital one day/week, I am advised that staff cannot be present in the office that day. Since this new policy went into effect, I've lost one of my best employees because it deprived her of her normal weekly hours. Now, a second employee is contemplating leaving as well. How can I argue against this policy?*

Apparently, as owners, this company feels you and your practice are obligated to follow policy, regardless of internal staffing consequence. It's not personal to them and it sounds as if the 'bottom line' is the only con-



cern. They see the employee as unnecessary cost while you, the necessary revenue, are absent.

Make clear to the owners that hiring and keeping quality employees 'part time' is complicated by the

ies, patients wanting to pay bills, emergency referrals and manage recall or marketing programs, etc. Not the best look for a practice to be essentially closed weekday hours.

- **Administrative/Clerical Tasks**, such as insurance and billing work, are typically done behind the scenes. Anyone in this position will tell you that these extremely time-consuming tasks are much easier to do and more effective when there is no

patient or co-worker interruption. This includes, for example, calling insurance companies, filing for appeals, communicating with patients, reviewing policies, posting and evaluating EOBs and EOMBs, posting

## There are a number of benefits involved in a cross-training program.

policy. The practice doesn't *stop* if you are not there. Consider the cost of losing new patients calling for an appointment and hello, answering machine! They will likely find another office that is open that day.

If you do not require your staff to perform medical care that specifically requires your licensed expertise, it is typical for staff to cover a medical office in the physician's absence. You must convince them that there are many functions staff can, and should, do in your absence. This allows the practice to continue operating at a level of excellence.

The specific tasks delegated to staff revolve around their individual job descriptions. Make certain the job descriptions match their tasks and are updated to include responsibilities associated with each one.

I can think of a number of doctor-less duties:

- **Daily Function** some duties listed here can also be shared by others in the office. Most important is having someone there to answer phones in real time, return and handle messages, make appointments for patients to pick up orthotics and shoes, reschedule patients, be present to deal with walk-ins, deliver-

insurance and patient payments, patient invoicing, preparing accounts for collections, applying credits and issuing refunds, A/R reports, accounts payable, fee schedule reviews and updates, etc.

- **Non-Clinical Tasks** order supplies, stock drawers, clean rooms, sterilize packs and instruments, inventory, packing and shipping orthotics and diabetic shoes, organize closets, update website and social media pages, hands on job training, review and update job descriptions, special projects assigned by physicians, conduct (uninterrupted) staff meetings to go through policy manual and/or changes, etc. PM



**Ms. Lynn Homisak**, retired President of SOS Healthcare Management Solutions, carries a Certificate in Human Resource Studies from Cornell University School of Industry and Labor Relations. She is the 2010 recipient of *Podiatry Management's* Lifetime Achievement Award and was inducted into the PM Hall of Fame. She is also an Editorial Advisor for *Podiatry Management* magazine and is recognized nationwide as a speaker, writer, and expert in staff and human resource management.