

# Three Strategies for Improving Staff Efficiency

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Staffing can be one of the greatest challenges in practice management, and one of the greatest sources of stress for doctors and dentists. Try these winning strategies to improve productivity and efficiency in your office.

## Invest in Staff Training

As a doctor, you have committed to continuing education throughout your career. In all likelihood, you exceed the minimum licensing requirements. You know that it is necessary to expand your skills and keep up with new developments. The same is true of other clinicians in your practice, as well as your office personnel. Inadequate or outdated training can contribute significantly to productivity problems.

Some of the most important areas of training include:

- **Technology** – A surprising number of dentists and doctors implement practice management software with little to no training. In addition to causing errors, this prevents your practice from utilizing the full benefit of a (very expensive) system.
- **Sales and service** – Customer service skills are essential for front office staff, and they are helpful for the rest of your team.
- **Cross-training** – Teaching employees to fill additional roles in your practice has several benefits. It can improve cooperation and efficiency between departments, because each understands the other's needs better. It also increases your option for filling vacancies when an employee misses work or requests time off.

# IMPROVE PRODUCTIVITY BY EXPANDING STAFF SKILLS



The more your employees know, the more valuable they become.  
The top five benefits of staff cross-training:

Allow employees to **"WALK IN EACH OTHER'S SHOES."** This helps teams and individuals work together seamlessly.



## REDUCE SCHEDULING STRESS.

You will have more options to fill the gap when a person unexpectedly calls in sick, as well as greater flexibility to grant requested time off.



## SAVE TIME.

Well-trained clinical employees can handle many of the common, time-consuming tasks that are often performed by the physician.

Improve day-to-day efficiency. If one person or department is overwhelmed with **MULTIPLE URGENT TASKS**, other people can help out.



## IMPROVE CUSTOMER SERVICE.

The more knowledgeable employees are about every aspect of the practice, the better they are able to answer patients' questions.

## HOW TO CREATE A CROSS-TRAINING PLAN

- Define responsibilities of each role and identify the most important tasks that person performs
- Identify the people who are capable for cross-training for each role
- Allocate adequate time and funds for training
- Have employees train each other in basic daily tasks
- Schedule extra staff to reduce the workload on trainers
- Identify specific goals and a timeline
- Monitor and evaluate the progress of trainees
- Ask for feedback from trainers and trainees



## TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL CROSS-TRAINING PROGRAM

- Encourage participation by offering recognition, opportunity for advancement, or financial incentives
- Discuss the benefits of teamwork and cross-training with your employees
- Periodically re-train, because people do not retain skills that they don't use regularly



## UNIVERSAL TRAINING

There are a few things that everyone in your office should know, regardless of their role. All employees should be trained in:



HIPAA guidelines



Your appointment cancellation policy



If you accept insurance



Any special offers or promotions you are currently offering



What services and procedures you offer



Your practice tagline and mission statement

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## Hire Carefully

Retraining is always preferable to replacing an employee, due to high costs and legal liability. However, in some cases, termination is the only feasible solution. More likely, sub-par employees may leave when they realize that they will be held to high standards. Of course, vacancies also occur because people retire, move away, or you simply need to expand your staff. Whatever the reason, you can avoid many future problems by choosing the right person.

Hiring is a tedious process, and you might be tempted to go with the first candidate who seems qualified enough. However, you don't want to settle for "good enough." If you want to wow patients and maximize efficiency, you need to start with top quality employees.

When evaluating applicants, look beyond experience and credentials. Some of the most important qualifications cannot be listed on a resume. When conducting interviews, evaluate traits such as:

- **Positive attitude** – A good employee is a team player, eager to learn, and enthusiastic. Take into consideration the culture within your practice. Every team dynamic is unique. Would this person be a good fit?
- **Appropriate for the role** – Someone in a customer service position should be outgoing and friendly, with excellent communication skills. A bookkeeper or HIPAA compliance manager should be detail oriented. Clinical staff should have a compassionate manner.
- **Dedication** – Does the person want a long-term career with your practice? The lack of upward mobility in a medical practice is a common cause of employee turnover. Make sure that applicants understand your management hierarchy, what opportunities are available, and what incentives you offer.
- **Patient care beliefs** – Your standard of care is part of your brand identity, and an important building block in patient loyalty. Is your practice known for being ultra-efficient or child-friendly? Do you believe in a heavy focus on patient education, or promise patients that they will never be lectured? Whatever your patient care beliefs and policies may be, make sure your new hire is in alignment with them.

## Stop Micromanaging

You may be surprised to learn that your management style can contribute to staffing problems. Doctors and dentists tend to have a strong sense of personal responsibility, and independent work style. When there is a problem, they identify it, determine the cause, and create a detailed plan to solve it. They insist that their orders be followed precisely, because they know that any misstep will reduce the effectiveness.

In patient care, this approach is simply diagnosis and treatment, which is what physicians are trained for. However, when the same approach is applied to the business aspect of a medical practice, it becomes micromanagement. The physician personally directs every task, makes managerial decisions without team input, and avoids delegating responsibility.

Of course, as the practice manager, you know your office better than anyone. Why is micromanagement a problem?

- **Physician burnout:** Answering simple questions, smoothing out minor daily glitches, and overseeing mundane tasks should not be the direct responsibility of the medical director. It can eat up your time, cause you to fall behind, and skyrocket your stress levels. Lower level managers and trusted employees should reduce your workload, not add to it.
- **Reduced employee productivity:** Staff members often resent working under a microscope and having minimal flexibility in their own workflow. Additionally, micromanagement reduces employee confidence and discourages people from taking initiative to solve problems.
- **Office inefficiency:** What happens when there is an issue, but you are busy with a patient? Or when a patient is waiting to see you, but you are busy with administrative tasks? These delays hinder the overall workflow. Additionally, employees that feel unempowered or incompetent tend to make more errors and be less productive.

The antidote to micromanagement is effective delegation and teamwork. Involve your staff in decisions, especially those directly impacted. Are there too many billing errors? Ask employees in that department what is wrong, and how they suggest correcting it. Find out if they need more help, better training in software use, or changes in procedures. Most importantly, learn to trust your employees and managers.

According to Karen Dillon, a Harvard Business Review author, the key to good management is training and delegation. Acknowledge that you can't feasibly deal with every detail, and learn to prioritize. Focus on the issues that are most important, and trust your team to handle the micro-details.

### About the Author:

Naren Arulrajah is President and CEO of Ekwa Marketing, a complete internet marketing company that focuses on SEO, social media, marketing education, and the online reputations of dentists and physicians. With a team of 180+ full time marketers, [www.ekwa.com](http://www.ekwa.com) helps doctors who know where they want to go, get there by dominating their market and growing their business significantly year after year. If you have questions about marketing your practice online, call 855-598-3320 to speak one-on-one with Naren.