

Three Reasons Your Urgent Care Can't Find Great Employees

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Success in urgent care (or in any business, for that matter) begins with having the “right” people on your team. Therefore, a common complaint from urgent care operators is “we’re constantly looking for people but so few of the applicants are worth hiring.” While it’s true the job market is tightening and demand for skilled medical professionals is rising, it’s also true that good people are always to be found. They may just be working elsewhere meaning it’s up to you to make your center an interesting and desirable place to apply. If you’re frustrated over your seeming inability to attract quality people, then maybe you should re-consider some of your management behaviors:

1. Are you willing to let go of problem employees to make room for new hires?

Urgent care centers retain underperforming, disgruntled or difficult employees far longer than they should because they give in to negative thoughts: “any staff is better than no staff,” “I don’t have time to interview/hire a replacement,” and/or “maybe the situation will improve if given time.” However, according to the April, 2013 *Journal of Urgent Care Medicine* article entitled, “Dealing With Employee Termination: Smart Strategies for Optimizing Your Team,” (<http://www.jucm.com/dealing-with-employee-termination-smart-strategies-for-optimizing-your-team>), the longer each problem employee remains, the greater his/her negative impact on your center’s patients, reputation and other team members. Not to mention the amount of management time diverted to human resources and customer service issues. The result is often lost productivity, poor morale, staff resentment, turnover, legal liability and lost revenue. And every day you retain a problem employee, you keep a potential new hire—one who actually wants the job—from applying his/her skills to helping your center improve.

2. Are you looking in the right (or enough) places and fully leveraging your networks?

In this “digitally connected” day and age, simply printing a help-wanted ad in the local newspaper is no longer enough and will typically attract the very element you are *not* looking to hire. There are many places to look for qualified job applicants in your community, so if your “pool” of potential candidates is a bit shallow, consider posting open positions across multiple channels:

- Urgent Care Center Website
- Social Media including Facebook and LinkedIn
- Craigslist, Indeed.com and Area Job Boards
- Monster.com and CareerBuilder.com
- Temporary Staffing Agencies
- Newspaper Classifieds (Print and Digital)
- Industry Job Boards and Conferences

Although advertising an open position costs money...for everyone who reads your listing it also reinforces the availability of your center’s location and services so such can be considered a marketing investment for your business.

Just because somebody currently has a job...doesn’t mean they aren’t entertaining thoughts of doing something else. Have you ever received special attention or outstanding service from a waiter/waitress, store clerk or bank teller that you would like to see emulated in your center, with your patients? There’s nothing wrong with asking if someone is satisfied in his/her current position or if they’re looking to make a change—many people working in service industries today are looking for “permanent” full-time work with benefits—so that special person who impressed you elsewhere could very well be your next new hire.

Some of your best job candidates should come as referrals from loyal patients who have used and are familiar with your center. So in addition to seeking applicants from the community, consider posting available positions in your waiting

room or at the front desk, in your patient newsletter, and on your website. Word of mouth will travel that you're hiring. Thus, leverage your social networks by letting people in your "groups" know you're looking for a particular position or skill.

3. Have you created the type of working environment that will attract and retain good people?

Southwest Airlines, Nordstrom, Starbucks, Disney, Apple and all the other frequently cited "customer service" leaders not only invest significant resources into recruiting, onboarding and training to deliver brand-differentiating experiences, they are also known for their unique cultures that:

- Give employees a sense of purpose by being part of something significantly larger than themselves;
- Empower employees to deliver good customer service by giving them authority to fix problems;
- Engage employees outside the workplace through service to the community and each other; and
- Reward extraordinary effort via incentive plans, periodic contests, spot bonuses and career advancement.

These "award-winning" cultures also acknowledge that they're not a "fit" for everyone and thus have interviewing and onboarding processes to "root out" applicants who "would be better off working elsewhere."

So, what's it like to work in your urgent care center today? Many urgent care centers are plagued by poorly configured processes that result in long patient waits, underinvested technology systems that result in frequent documentation errors, and maladaptive policies that lead to dissatisfied customers. When patients become angry or frustrated, they take out their ire on the "face" of the practice, which is the front line staff. A day spent dealing with system and paperwork hassles, re-work in correcting errors, and listening to patient complaints can take a toll on the most loyal of employees. "Good" people—presumably those with the skills and experience to get a job elsewhere—won't hang around a stressful and unrewarding workplace for long, leaving your center with "C-grade" employees who are complacent about their jobs. When their focus shifts from "doing the right thing" to "hanging on for survival," a center's culture can become plagued by gossip, bullying, harassment, favoritism, and other unsavory behaviors.

And remember; no competent clinician wants to work with a disgruntled and/or poorly trained medical support staff so your ability to attract and retain quality providers (responsible for delivering the services you "sell") is directly tied to your management of the center's staff.

In short, if you want to attract and retain good people, you need to create a working environment that leads to the type of patient experiences that get people talking, drive repeat visits, and cultivate patient loyalty. Urgent care centers who do that find qualified applicants will seek out working there, making the job of recruiting much easier.

Conclusion

An aging population, increased lifestyle-induced illness, and increased numbers of insured patients are all attributed to the skyrocketing demand for qualified medical receptionists, medical assistants, medical technicians and primary care clinicians—the workforce needed to keep urgent care running on a day-to-day basis. That's why many urgent care centers hold on to "bad" employees longer than they should. And it's also why they complain "good candidates don't exist." Fact of the matter is good people are to be found; perhaps they just aren't applying at *your* center. To improve the quality of your job applicants, it's therefore necessary to cast a "wider net" by listing positions across multiple channels, engaging your social networks, and ultimately—by creating a meaningful, engaging and rewarding workplace that's focused on providing an outstanding patient experience.