

## **Five Activities for Cultivating a Motivated Center Team**

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How does the staff of your urgent care center approach work in the morning? In a zombie-like state, complacent over the routine, predictable tasks that lie ahead? Or bright, happy, and full of life—eager to delight patients and do their best to make the practice a success? In addition to assuring equipment, supplies, and protocols are in place for safe delivery of medical care, managing billing and collections so that overhead and salaries are covered, and tending to legal and compliance issues—every urgent care operator is responsible cultivating a motivated center team.

Motivated employees identify with the mission, vision and values of the practice and have committed to making it a success. But even when employees are self-motivated, management plays an important role in creating an environment where employees know what's expected of them, have the tools and training to do their jobs well, and are held accountable for their own performance. The following five activities can help you transform your urgent care staff into a motivated, high-performance team:

### **1) Accept that you cannot motivate employees—all motivation is self-motivation.**

Employee motivation stems from a myriad of positive and negative emotions—a quest for personal fulfillment, fear of being unable to meet financial obligations, and a longing for social approval. External factors—promotions, bonuses and praise—may influence an employee's motivation, but only if he or she *buys in* to them. This principle explains why some people are motivated to engage in selfish, anti-social, or self-defeating behavior. It also explains why center staff will agree to work late in exchange for overtime pay, but treat patients rudely and complain about the personal activities they're missing. Whether managers can "motivate" otherwise unmotivated employees is debatable, but it's certain that managers can help employees form a bond with the center that fosters self-motivation. Such is done by assuring that employees are clear on how their jobs fit into the "big picture," have sufficient training and adequate tools to do what's expected of them, and receive recognition and incentives tied to performance.

### **2) Ask what motivates your employees and connect it to their job activities.**

People can be driven by fear, anger, love, greed, or any other emotion. The starting place in cultivating motivated employees is to understand the unique factors that drive each one of them. Employees just seeking a paycheck are not usually motivated to do more than the minimum required to get paid. By contrast, employees who define themselves by their career progression, find purpose in helping others, are stimulated by problem solving, or enjoy the social interaction of belonging to a team—are more likely to be motivated to "go above and beyond."

As an urgent care operator, you can cultivate motivation by linking what drives employees to their job activities. So even if a medical assistant is only motivated by a paycheck—you can influence such motivation by tying what you need her to do to bonuses, incentives, or overtime pay. If another employee is driven by social needs, likewise influence motivation by creating opportunities to interact with co-workers, engage in team-building, cross-train in other roles, and participate in grassroots marketing. Knowing what drives your employees entails getting to know them—interviews, performance reviews, weekly one-on-one sessions, and yearly employee satisfaction surveys all reveal what motivates employees and how well working at the center is meeting their needs.

### **3) Encourage entrepreneurial thinking and intelligent risk taking.**

Are your employees “hired help” or “business partners?” How employees perceive their roles in an urgent care center will determine their attitudes towards its owners and operators. In order for employees to feel like “partners,” they should have a basic business understanding of how revenue captured from patient visits flows out through salaries, overhead, and profits—and how everyone’s job interacts to generate income. If a registration specialist, for example, sees her job as simply typing patient data into the computer—not only will she view the work as monotonous, she will also pay little attention to the details. By contrast, if the registration assistant understands that accurate demographics are vital to clean insurance claims—the financial lifeblood of the center—and that clean claims circumvent complaints to her peers in billing, she will likely be more conscientious in her role. Especially if she also understands that warm, welcoming “first impressions” at registration lead to repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth from satisfied patients.

Business acumen, innovative thinking, and intelligent risk-taking are all requisites to business success. In fact, the definition of “entrepreneurism” is “taking finance and business acumen to transform innovations into economic goods.” Certainly the founders of an urgent care center identified an unmet need for medical services in the community, created an operating model to meet those needs, and then took calculated risks in opening a center that would yield a financial return. Yet, why is it that an employee in the same center who experiments with new ways of doing his or her job can face firing or disciplinary action? Employees become complacent and detached when they think it’s too difficult to affect any positive change.

“Hired help” does exactly as it’s told while “business partners” figure out the best way to solve a problem and yield a return. To get employees to act more like “partners,” managers should encourage them to identify new and more efficient ways of doing their jobs. If employees are afraid to take action, a starting place may be a group “brainstorming” session that solicits employee feedback as to what’s working and what can be improved. When changes work out well, recognize the employee’s contribution, and when they don’t work—discuss the reasons why and see if there’s a way to improve upon the suggestion. Once employees see a willingness to embrace change, they will begin to volunteer their own suggestions. Over time, entrepreneurial thinking and calculated risk taking will not only yield more motivated employees, but also increased efficiency and profitability of the center.

### **4) Communicate expectations and connect employee motivation to performance.**

Just as urgent care operators don’t “motivate” the center’s employees; employees don’t take risks and work hard for the center’s owners. Rather, people work to meet their own needs. To tap employee’s intrinsic motivation, an urgent care operator should let employees know what’s “in it for them” if they meet or exceed performance expectations. Examples of incentives include cash bonuses, promotions, pay raises, greater autonomy, more responsibility, better schedules, and special recognition in front of peers. If an operator withholds, delays, or changes incentives, employees will decouple their efforts from the incentives and lose motivation. Incentives should be clear, unchanging, provided on a timely basis, and relevant to employees. For example, if the center employs single mothers with childcare issues, a cash bonus would be more likely to motivate strong performance than recognition at an evening dinner party.

Tying motivation to performance requires that employees understand exactly what’s expected of them and what behaviors and attitudes distinguish “average” from the “exceptional.” Expectations and performance standards should be defined during the interview process and reviewed at regular intervals, making necessary revisions as the employee progresses. To whatever extent possible, employees should be involved in developing their own performance standards. This helps employees better understand expectations, enables employees to identify potential obstacles, and also assures employees are fully “bought in” to perform.

## 5) Help employees take responsibility for their own motivation.

When an urgent care center stumbles, blame typically goes to a lack of “accountability” on the part of front-line staff. Accountability means being responsible for your own actions and their outcomes. In most urgent care centers, employees are responsible for their actions but their managers are responsible for the outcomes. Holding employees accountable means giving them responsibility for their work and the tools, training, and support necessary to perform.

Because accountability is based on results, employees should not be restricted by their job titles but rather, have room for creativity and autonomy to do what’s “best” for the patient and business, to learn the roles and responsibilities of everyone else in the center, and to have freedom to exercise good judgment and common sense in solving problems. To “lock down” accountability, managers should get each employee to commit to their performance requirements in writing, conduct regular performance reviews, and provide incentives or penalties for exceeding, meeting, or falling short of performance goals.

### Conclusion

What type of workforce are you cultivating in your urgent care center? Empowered “business partners” who have bonded with the practice and are accountable for its success? Or “hired help” that’s motivated by a paycheck and will do little more than what they’re told? Urgent care is a people business so a key to success as an urgent care operator is the ability to cultivate motivation by understanding what drives employees, encouraging ownership and risk taking, connecting motivations to performance, and holding employees accountable for their own actions and outcomes.

**Table 1: What type of workforce are you cultivating in your urgent care?**

<b>Un-empowered Employees: Hired Help</b> <i>“It’s just a job.”</i>	<b>Empowered Employees: Business Partners</b> <i>“I love my job.”</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negative and bored with their jobs—walk around like zombies, looking forward to quitting time.</li> <li>• Speak negatively about the center to others and tell friends and family about its shortcomings.</li> <li>• Blame others for their lack of performance and/or failure of the center.</li> <li>• Motivated by “lower order” needs to provide food, shelter, and other necessities or by fear of losing their jobs, criticism, punishment or embarrassment.</li> <li>• Usually end up being rewarded twice for doing the basics of their job.</li> <li>• Timid with poor self-concept—discourages and brings down everyone around them.</li> <li>• Not sure what they’re supposed to do and/or lack the training, skills, or tools to do their job well—feel like a small part of a big machine.</li> <li>• Don’t feel the need to do anything other than the minimum required for their role. Work is sloppy and error-prone.</li> <li>• Never challenges the status quo, does everything by the book, or is restricted by policies and procedures.</li> <li>• Restricted by their title or position—feel powerless to do anything beyond their narrow area of responsibility. “Not my job” or “not my problem.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enthusiastic and interested in their jobs—are happy and it shows they’re looking forward to each new day.</li> <li>• Take pride in telling others where they work and encourage friends and family to use the center.</li> <li>• Feel accountable for their performance and the success of the center.</li> <li>• Motivation comes from within and from “higher order” needs such as esteem and self-actualization.</li> <li>• Eager to go “above and beyond” for benefits other than money.</li> <li>• Confident with high self-esteem—encourages and builds up everyone around them.</li> <li>• Know exactly what’s expected of them, how their job impacts others, and how their job contributes to the center’s bottom line.</li> <li>• Eager to do anything they can—or find the best person who can—to help patients and drive the business. Conscientious and detail-oriented in their work.</li> <li>• Encouraged to find new and creative ways to do their jobs, resulting in improved efficiency and smoother operations.</li> <li>• Able to work across functions or roles—free to exercise good judgment and common sense in solving problems. “It is my job and I’ll make it my problem.”</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Collaborates with colleagues in an adversarial “us versus them” stance against patients and/or management.</li><li>• Managers are distrustful of employees and spend time micromanaging, look over employee shoulders, and make a big deal out of mistakes.</li><li>• Disinterested in the center and are secretly undermining its future success—don’t plan to be with the center long-term.</li><li>• Employees are responsible for actions but management is responsible for results.</li><li>• Unaware of what’s going on with the business and don’t really care.</li><li>• Pays little attention to the industry and/or believes the “grass is greener” at competitors.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Collaborates with colleagues in assuring efficient and smooth patient flow and with management in improving the overall operation.</li><li>• Managers have delegated responsibility to employees and spend time in developing and providing them the resources they need, and celebrating their successes.</li><li>• Interested in the center—how it started, how it grew, and where it’s headed—and vested in seeing it succeed.</li><li>• Employees are responsible for actions and the entire team is responsible for results.</li><li>• Aware of how the business is doing—including financial metrics like profitability and cash flow.</li><li>• Understands the competition and evaluates what competitors are doing well and what can be learned from them to woo patients away.</li></ul>
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