

Motivating Employees: Going Beyond Monetary Rewards



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Without question, monetary rewards (eg, salary increases, bonuses, incentives tied to initiative results) can encourage employees to comply with directives and, at least temporarily, modify behaviors to receive these rewards; however, do changes in an employee's behavior brought on by monetary rewards mean that he/she agrees with your practice's mission and vision, thus enabling you to build an employee culture that continually produces patient satisfaction, loyalty, and referrals? Not necessarily. When it comes to your practice's culture, the classic song rings true: "Money can't buy [you] love."

Patient loyalty and word-of-mouth referrals occur when patients feel emotionally connected to your practice and your brand (ie, what your practice represents or stands for in their minds). This type of connection is cultivated on the emotional level through a patient's personal experience with your practice rather than technical skills or outcomes.

When patients come to your practice for treatment, they assume your employees possess the qualifications and technical abilities needed to achieve desired results; by doing so, employees are only meeting patient expectations. To garner loyalty and stimulate referrals, however, patients must feel that employees have exceeded their expectations. In most cases, exceeding expectations

comes down to the attitudes and actions of engaged staff, which result in intangible payoffs within the patient experience that money cannot buy because they come from the heart (eg, emotional gratification, feeling of being more satisfied).

According to a 2011 employee engagement study of 630 US employees, engaged employees not only feel happier at work but are far more likely to work harder for their employer (approximately 65% more likely, to be precise) than their less-engaged coworkers; however, less than one-third of US employees say they feel connected (engaged) with their job or employer.¹ Although approximately 90% of employers may recognize the importance of employee engagement and its impact on overall success of the business, more than three-quarters of employers do not have an employee engagement plan or strategy in place.²

There are several steps you can take to create a corporate culture that engages your employees so that you can deliver extraordinary patient experiences. Most importantly, hire strategically. When choosing a candidate, it is important not only to consider his/her education and technical skills but also to screen and utilize his/her references to obtain information about the candidate's attitude, demeanor, and personality. Also look for indicators that the candidate shares your corporate values and would be likely to support the mission and vision of your practice. Determine if the candidate would be a good fit with the rest of your staff and include current employees in the interview process to gain additional insight on the candidate.

Ideally you have chosen employees that are a good fit for your practice. But what if you identify concerns based on prior hiring decisions? There are several tactics to consider for improving your current employee culture. First, start addressing your concerns today. Make the embodiment of your practice's mission and vision

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the new measure of employee performance as well as the basis for job descriptions and salary reviews. Also make sure each employee understands how his/her role contributes to patient satisfaction and the overall mission of your practice. Then discuss shared values that you identify as the heart of your employee culture. Remember to provide education and training opportunities that will enrich your employees' technical skills, promote personal development, enhance their interpersonal skills, and encourage value-based thinking. Finally, ask your employees to sign written commitments to your practice and its values, mission, and vision, and make recommitment to these goals part of each employee's annual review or your annual employee retreat.

Ultimately, money can be a good incentive for deserving employees, but it does not guarantee that your staff is upholding the goals of your practice. Instead, focus on engaging your employees and creating a culture in which your staff feels connected to your practice and its mission to continually promote patient loyalty and satisfaction.

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