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# **222 Secrets of Hiring, Managing, and Retaining Great Employees in Healthcare Practices**

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**Bob Levoy**



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# Dedication

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**I**n loving memory of Morton Roberts, M.D.



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# Introduction

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**T**he challenge of finding, managing, and retaining great employees is greater today than ever before. The job market is tight—especially in many niches of the healthcare professions. Basic skills are in short supply. Recruiting and hiring is a minefield. And employees today simply don't respond to the motivations of yesterday.

Yet some healthcare providers always seem to find and keep top performers who work hard, enjoy what they're doing, and pull together to achieve operational efficiency, patient satisfaction, and practice growth.

This book will provide a blueprint of what they have done and what you can do to make it happen in your practice.

## **Real Practices, Real Solutions**

In the course of my career, I've had the privilege of conducting more than 3,000 seminars and in-service programs for a wide range of healthcare providers throughout North America and overseas.

As part of the market research for these programs, I have visited countless practices, multi-specialty groups, and institutions of varying size, where I've had the opportunity to interview leading practitioners, practice administrators, and managers as well as employees themselves.

Among the questions I've posed to those with supervisory responsibilities are the following:

- When interviewing job applicants, which techniques and questions have been most useful in identifying top performers?
- In an environment where there are more healthcare jobs than qualified workers, and in many cases higher salaries available elsewhere, how do you retain top performers?
- What are the keys to keeping employee motivation in high gear?
- What are the keys to improving staff performance and productivity?
- What have been your toughest human resource management problems, and how did you solve them?
- What lessons have you learned about the hiring, managing, and retention of great employees that may help others avoid costly mistakes?

The answers to such questions became the framework for this book.

## **Terminology and Unique Features of This Book**

This book is written for a diverse audience in the healthcare professions. Because of the wide range of specialties and organizations involved, I've used a few shortcuts.

The acronym *HCP* (healthcare provider) is used to designate the person responsible for hiring, managing, and retaining employees—recognizing that in your organization, it may be a practice administrator, office manager, or someone with an entirely different title.

The term *great employees*, as used in the title of this book, refers to those who have an emotional commitment to their jobs and to the organizations for which they work. Great employees are more willing to provide the extra measure of dedication, care, and effort on behalf of patients as well as co-workers—that represents the difference between

*acceptable* job performance and *outstanding* job performance. This “discretionary effort” is what employees *choose* to do as opposed to what their job descriptions *obligate* them to do. The book will explain what makes it happen in some organizations and not in others.

The word *practice*, used as a noun throughout the book, refers to the setting in which healthcare services are provided—again recognizing that yours may be a hospital, HMO, multi-specialty group, ambulatory clinic, long-term care facility, or some other type of healthcare organization.

The expression *high performance practice* refers to one with above-average patient satisfaction, referrals, productivity, profitability, and practice growth—a subject about which I’ve written several books. One of the common threads among these outstanding practices is that they have the right people, in the right jobs, doing the right things, at the right time—which, in turn, has led to this book about hiring, managing, and retaining the “right” people.

Among the unique features of this book are the following:

➔ **Action steps:** These tell you how to easily implement the ideas presented in this book.

➔ **Hard learned lessons:** These represent the priceless, real-world wisdom that people have acquired about the hiring, managing, and retention of great employees.

➔ **From the success files:** These stories from actual practices validate many of the concepts presented in this book. The philosopher Bertram Russell said, “The very best proof that something can be done is that others have already done it.”

➔ **Reality checks:** These inserts are intended to “keep it real.”

## Blind Spots

In the back of the eye where the optic nerve enters, is an area about 1.5 mm in diameter called the blind spot. What makes it unusual is that it is not affected by light and has no sensation of vision.

To experience the blind spot, hold this page at arm’s length; close your left eye and look directly at the dot on the left. Then bring the page slowly toward your face. For a brief interval, when the page is

about 10 to 12 inches away, the right dot will suddenly vanish from view, only to reappear as the page is brought still closer toward you.



*Management blind spots* occur when healthcare providers fail to see the impact their words and behavior have on employees. Many HCPs, for example, are plagued by employee morale, motivation, and turnover problems and can't account for it. They often blame the employees, the economy, or some other entity they can't control—when in many cases, such problems are their own doing.

➔**Hard learned lesson #1:** “Many ailing organizations have developed a functional blindness to their own defects,” observed John W. Gardner, Lyndon Johnson’s Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare. “They’re not suffering because they cannot *resolve* their problems, but because they cannot *see* their problems.”

It’s been said that the first step in solving a problem is *recognition*. It is my hope that this book will help you recognize any problems pertaining to the hiring, management, and retention of employees that you may have overlooked, underestimated, or perhaps created without realizing it. In addition, I’ll share 222 strategies that high performance HCPs have utilized to put their employees’ morale, motivation, productivity, and loyalty into high gear.

➔**Reality check:** The information given in this book is not intended as legal advice or as a substitute for legal consultation regarding the general hiring process or the management of specific situations.

With that caveat in mind, let’s turn to the first step: getting the right people on board.

Bob Levoy



## Prologue

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# The Importance of Staff

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**E**veryone who works at Summa Health Systems in Akron, Ohio, carries the following wallet-sized card (see page xviii) with them. Besides being a powerful statement of their values and beliefs, it's also a way to remind both newcomers and long-time employees that the hospital is judged by their performance.

These same principles apply to any size healthcare facility—from a large, multi-specialty institution to a solo practice

### **Ambassadors for Your Practice**

Employees' behavior and comments outside office hours also carry significant weight. It affects how their friends, neighbors, and relatives feel about the practice or institution for which they work. In many cases, people's only knowledge of a healthcare practice, ambulatory clinic, hospital, or long-term care facility is through its employees. What employees say about their jobs and the people with whom they work can be extremely positive if they're committed and enthusiastic—or deadly if they're miserable in their jobs.

► **Hard learned lesson:** As a healthcare provider, the importance of your staff cannot be overemphasized.

“You are Summa. You are what people see when they arrive here. Yours are the eyes they look in to when they’re frightened and lonely. Yours are the voices people hear when they ride the elevators and when they try to sleep and when they try to forget their problems. You are what they hear on their way to appointments that could affect their destinies. And what they hear after they leave those appointments. Yours are the comments people hear when you think they can’t. Yours is the intelligence and caring that people hope they find here.

If you’re noisy, so is the hospital. If you’re rude, so is the hospital. And if you’re wonderful, so is the hospital. No visitors, no patients, no physicians, or co-workers can ever know the real you, the you that you know is there—unless you let them see it. All they can know is what they see and hear and experience.

And so we have a stake in your attitude and in the collective attitudes of everyone who works at the hospital. We are judged by your performance. We are the care you give, the attention you pay, the courtesies you extend.

Thank you for all you’re doing.”<sup>1</sup>

## Reference

1. Boyatzis R, McKee A. *Resonant Leadership*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press; 2005.