



# Hiring Right Makes Your Practice More Profitable and Pleasant

By Karen Zupko

When Lucy showed up for the interview, you thought your prayers were answered. Here was the patient coordinator/office manager candidate you had always envisioned. Actually Lucy's resume and cover letter caught your attention; they were among the best you'd seen. Well-groomed, articulate with a soothing slightly Southern accent, she was on time and had a great handshake.

All of your questions were answered competently and professionally. You almost jumped up and cheered during the interview. *"At last,"* you allowed yourself to think, *"she's terrific."* Perhaps it was this enthusiasm that allowed you to be persuaded by her request to not check the practice she'd been with in another state. When you asked why, she demurred that there had been *"ethical issues,"* and she said she didn't feel that it was right to divulge the *"dirty laundry."* Appreciating her discretion, you didn't check with that practice. And, you hired her on the spot.

If you have a sinking feeling in your stomach, because perhaps you hired a Lucy, one of those *"too good to be true"* candidates who wasn't—your instincts are correct. The details don't matter. Lucy had problems—a lot of them, and they quickly became the practice's and surgeon's.

Recruiting and interviewing employees is never easy and face it, it's usually done under an impossible deadline. But your staff can make or break your practice. Take it from Gerald Graham, former dean of the W. Barton School of Management at Wichita State University who was asked the three most important criteria of successful management.

His reply: *"Selection, selection, selection"* and it wasn't selection of patients or an office location that he was talking about—it was the personnel. Bickering, jealous, marginally competent staff produce palpable tension felt by patients and provide you with a daily source of irritation.



Add technological fluency to the list of qualities you look for in good staff: professional, punctual, neat and courteous. You cannot afford to hire a managerial Luddite given your investments in your website, SEO practice management software, EMR and digital photography. How many client practices have we seen with \$35,000 or more in practice management software used at the lowest possible level? Too many to report on.

So follow our formula for hiring smarter this time around:

## 1. Double check the existing job descriptions. Are the required technology competencies listed?

Many plastic surgeons contemplating an investment in EMR will require, for example a nurse with not only a Florence Nightingale temperament and clinical skills, but a willingness to embrace technology and lead the change—particularly if the plan is to see that EHR incentive money.

2. **Check your applicants' online reputations.** It is shocking what you can learn by looking at MySpace, YouTube, Facebook and the blogosphere. If it's a managerial candidate, look at Pulse and LinkedIn. You may find that the resume you have doesn't match their online job history. The photos you see may generate questions about common sense and integrity.

3. **Test and Assess.** We've found a useful tool at [www.totaltesting.com](http://www.totaltesting.com).

We recommend using the assessment while the applicant is in your office. Having them do it offsite may mean that a *"coach,"* probably a teenager, is helping answer the questions. The format varies with the test topic. We recommend using the test on "Microsoft Word" for both applicants and existing staff. It displays a Word interface for the test taker to control and use in completing specific tasks. Results are reported back instantly. We particularly like the fact that the time taken to answer each question is shown. Each online test costs a very reasonable \$20.

Just because someone doesn't test as high as Melinda Gates, doesn't mean that you aren't going to hire them. But, it does mean that you can hire them provisionally with the stated expectation that their scores will improve. We recommend funding Windows education at a local junior college, online training, or hiring a teacher who comes to the practice. Another useful tool, Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing can help anyone improve their keying accuracy and speed. You can download it for \$29.99. Ten to fifteen minutes of practice every day should boost the staffers speed, skill and accuracy.

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**4. Do a background check on all new applicants.** Yes, everyone. Even if they go to your church, temple or mosque. What news about cheating clergy, lying Senate candidates and college coaches with fake degrees has failed to reach you? Verify educational background. Multiple sources (Career Builder, CNN Money) agree that the education section of the resume often contains wishful thinking rather than earned degrees. Perhaps the degree is not a deal breaker for you, but dishonesty should be. Look at the applicant's credit history. Plastic surgeons are not known for tight audit controls—beware the “profit sharing” minded manager! A background check can be initiated after setting up an account at [www.trustedemployees.com](http://www.trustedemployees.com); reference ASAPS when you register. Register at the start of your search, since

it takes a few days to open a new account. Check references. Do drug testing if you have an ASC or operating room.

**5. Does their expected compensation fall within a range you're comfortable paying,** i.e., competitive, but not more than is sensible? Why wait until you've spent over an hour interviewing, to figure out that when it comes to salary, you are on Saturn and they are in the next solar system? Determine if the candidate values the retirement savings plans, health insurance, uniform allowance and transit passes or parking subsidy you provide. A gap the size of the Grand Canyon, when the relationship starts, never closes.

There is more to interviewing and screening than we've discussed here. But, adding these tips to your hiring tool box improves the likelihood of selecting great staff with both the will and skill to successfully take on the responsibilities in your office.

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