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Better Management is Better MedicineSM

Practice + Manager = Winning Combination – 2006

A hospital administrator or practice manager is high on the list of must-haves for WellIMPs. Seventy-one percent of this year's study participants currently employ an administrator or manager, and another 23 percent anticipate hiring one in the next two years. Knowing what they know now, 57 percent of owners would have hired a manager sooner.

Why are managers so popular? Practices who employ (or plan to employ) an administrator or manager agree the top reasons for hiring one are the ability to delegate employee development, an improvement in the owners' quality of life, and it gives the owner the ability to focus on medicine and strategic planning.

Owners tell us that their managers have saved them an average of 15 hours per week. Practices with a hospital administrator or practice manager have a lower overall staff cost as a percent of revenue (by about 1 percent), and doctor production averages \$46,000 more than in practices without a manager. These are certainly compelling reasons to hire a manager!

Hiring the right manager is an investment in the future. The manager will consistently support the practice's mission and inspire others' commitment to the practice's mission. He or she will mentor and educate the patient care and management teams in client relations, management, and leadership to ensure continued growth personally and professionally. The manager will also represent you within the practice and in the community.

Your success hiring the right manager begins with determining what you're seeking. Too many times I encounter owners who aren't satisfied with their manager's performance. Yet when prompted, the owner can't describe his or her vision for and expectations of the manager. Nor have they written a job description for the manager's position.

This year's study results confirm the importance of defining expectations up front. We asked owners, "Identify one thing that you and you manager could do to improve your effectiveness as a team." "Clarify responsibilities" was the most frequently cited response.

Neglecting to think about what you need in a manager before the interview process begins makes it very difficult to know when you've found the right person. It's also a recipe for dissatisfaction (and perhaps disaster!) once the manager is hired. Based on your needs, make a list of the qualities that you'd like to see in a candidate. Separate your list into qualities that are "must have" and "nice to have."



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No applicant will have all the ideal talents and competencies you identify. So, as you review candidates, keep your must-have list in mind, and don't compromise. For other qualities, make a conscious decision about which skills you're willing to help your manager develop over time.

Once you've defined the qualities successful candidates will possess, establish a hiring protocol that outlines each step you'll take – from recruitment through hiring – to find a manager. Then create a position description that defines the responsibilities and expectations of the position. (See Management Tools at www.wellmp.com for position descriptions for the Hospital Administrator, Practice Manager, and Business Administrator.)

You've hired the ideal person. Now you can just sit back and watch him or her shine, right? Wrong! The work to develop a cohesive, productive team member has just begun. WellIMPs estimate the learning curve is 6 to 7 months for managers with more than 2 years of management experience, and longer for managers with less experience. Set the tone for a successful, long-term relationship the first day by beginning with a balanced orientation program. During this initial training period, you'll want to communicate your expectations clearly and develop the manager's understanding of hospital protocols. Doing so helps the manager become more efficient and productive as quickly as possible.

While you're pushing for progress on some fronts, keep your new manager motivated by building on his or her strengths. And as your manager becomes more accomplished, continue to look for opportunities to keep him or her enthused and moving forward, providing ongoing options for growth and professional development so he or she doesn't grow restless.

WellIMPs use a variety of resources to develop their managers, including *Veterinary Economics* Managers' Retreat, national and regional conferences, American Animal Hospital Association's Veterinary Management Institute and Veterinary Management School, and the Veterinary Hospital Manager's Association. Encourage them to read management journals and publications including *Veterinary Economics*, *Firstline*, *Trends*, and *The Harvard Business Review*.

Remember to get feedback from your manager. Employees are often your best source of information about their development needs. And to feel vested in the process, the manager must share responsibility for identifying areas in which he or she needs additional training.

Owners and managers tell us that to build a successful, long-term relationship the owner must communicate well; nurture the relationship; value and respect the manager's contributions; recognize and reward effort; and be fair, honest, and consistent. In return, the manager will bond clients and staff members to the practice, be productive and efficient, bring new ideas to the table, share knowledge, and help keep the practice moving forward.



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What advice would owners in WellMPs offer to a colleague who was considering whether his or her practice would benefit from hiring a manager? Dr. JoAnne Roesner of Loving Hands Animal Clinic in Alpharetta, GA says, "Bite the bullet and do it. I hurt my practice, efficacy, profitability and my own sanity waiting!"

Drs. George Seier and Belinda Hataway of Cobbs Ford Pet Health Center in Prattville, AL agree, "You may think you can't afford a manager, but actually you can't afford not to hire a manager. A manager can make you money, control staff issues and improve your quality of life."

To obtain additional information:

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