

# PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

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## Training Your Vision Therapists: A Key to Your Success

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Have you ever hired a new staff person, spent weeks, if not months training him or her as a vision therapist and they quit just before they were ready to see patients?

Training a therapist is a tremendous investment - an investment of your time, your staff's time (if you have another therapist available to help you) and financially. One of the biggest mistakes I have seen doctors make is hiring someone and immediately starting an intensive training program before making sure they have hired the right person.

The first step to training a therapist is making sure you have the right person for the job. Following are some general guidelines on the interview process, which is vital to finding the right staff.

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*Additional information can be obtained from <http://www.expansionconsultants.com>. During the October 2007 COVID/OEPF Practice Management Symposium, Ms. Bristol presented a lecture  "How to Effectively Train Your Vision Therapists." Dr. Gary Etting and Dr. Paul Harris also presented during this Symposium. The video is available from <http://digivisionmedia.com/lectures/covd/archive/2007-conference/>. Please search the 2007 COVID meeting recordings.*

### Hiring Tips

There are several things you want to check before you interview the applicant:

1. How well did the person deal with your front office staff when speaking with them on the phone and upon arrival into the office?
2. How neatly is the person dressed?
3. Is their appearance such that they would represent your office appropriately?
4. How neat is the person's handwriting?
5. Is the application filled out completely? (Attention to detail.) If the person comes in with a resume: still have the application form filled out, just tell the person to fill in any information which is not on the resume. Reason: you want to see their attention to detail, plus there is a statement on the application form which gives you the right to check references, and a statement from the applicant that if anything turns out to be false it is reason for termination.)
6. Are there any spelling errors? (How literate is this person?)

If the above are acceptable, then you can continue with a real interview. If the person doesn't pass the above points, the person may not be worth a full interview. Usually, a person should be giving you their best appearance on an interview. If this doesn't match your standards, then chances are they never will. If this is the case, don't waste a great deal of your time on interviewing someone who is not qualified. You can

do a short interview or have one of your staff do the interview and either let the person know you will get back with them, or you can find something in their application which disqualifies them for the position. Example: They are asking for \$12.00/hour and the position pays \$7.00. Or, they want to work different hours than what the position offers, etc. There are two pretty simple examples of where a brief call or letter explaining the differences in your expectations would suffice and no one's feelings get hurt.

When you are interviewing you need to give the applicants plenty of opportunities to let you know what type of person they are. In particular, you want to be sure you hire someone who will not only get the job done, but will also be a team member. One way to determine how good team member an applicant will be is by asking questions about the previous jobs to determine likes and dislikes. If the person complains a lot about a previous job, the chances are pretty good the person would not be team member. So, you want to give the applicant plenty of opportunities to talk so you can get enough information to make your decision.

### **Specific questions:**

1. What did they like most about their previous jobs?
2. What did they like least about their previous jobs?
3. Is there a particular job that stands out as the worst job they've ever had? Get the person to tell you about it.
4. Is there a particular job that stands out as the best job they've ever had? Get the person to tell you about it.

In asking these questions, you are looking for how much this person complains, as well as, what do they complain about? If the person is complaining about something you know the position will have the person doing, you know instantly this is not a good match.

Example: The person complains that the boss was continually changing the job description. Immediately you know this person has a hard time dealing with changes, and also wants a stable job that is clearly

defined. If the position you are offering is new to the practice, you know instantly this will probably not be a good match. So you will want to ask more questions, to determine exactly what occurred on the previous job, how many times was the job description changed and how extensively each time, etc.?

It is also very important that you make a note of what the person enjoys as well. Comparing their likes and dislikes should give you a good gauge as to whether or not applicants would enjoy the job you have to offer.

To help you see how easy it will be to train a particular applicant, teach him or her something basic about optometry or your office. Once you have explained it, get the person to explain what you said. The purpose for this is to see how quickly the person grasps new ideas, and how well he or she can explain those ideas to others. Continue with the interview and then ask the person to share what he or she remembers of what you explained earlier in the interview. This will give you a beginning concept of how easy this person will be to train.

When you are looking for a vision therapist, additional questions should be asked to determine how compatible the applicant will be with your patient base. For example:

1. Do you enjoy working with children?
2. What has your experience been in working with children?
3. What's the most difficult situation you have ever had to deal with in handling a child? How did it resolve?
4. What is the most number of children you have ever worked with at one time?
5. What is the longest period of time you have ever worked with a child? (5 min., 15 min., 2 hours?)

If you have a lot of adult patients, or specialize in treating traumatic brain injury cases, you want to get a concept of how the applicant will relate to adults as well. You could ask questions such as:

1. Have you ever worked with someone who had been through a major injury or stroke?

2. Do you think you would be comfortable being around someone who may not have all their faculties? Have you ever had an experience with this?

3. What skills do you have that you think might be helpful in working with these types of patients?

Make note of all their answers. Ideally you should have several applicants to choose from, so a written record of their answers (or at least notes that will jog your memory) will make it easier for you when reviewing everything to make your decision.

Happy hiring! Let me know if you have any questions on any part of this process.

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