

Creating Staff Loyalty and Retention

How you treat your staff can make or break a business.

BY STEPHEN COLEMAN, MD, AND ANN COLEMAN SPEER

The two of us started Coleman Vision in 1996 and ran the practice without a staff for about 2 years. Since then, it has grown considerably but is still regarded as a small company. We therefore have the luxury of nurturing our employees and benefiting from that attention in the forms of their high productivity and retention. We recognize the importance of peoples' personal lives and have adopted a corporate culture that allows for flexibility. We aim to maintain our employees' loyalty by rewarding them from time to time and taking the importance of their livelihood into account. This article highlights some of our practices that keep both us and

our employees very happy and the business running smoothly and productively.

WHOM WE HIRE

Dr. Coleman has never considered hiring an individual from another refractive practice. He would rather employ a former patient who is kind, smart, well dressed, and friendly or else someone with a special spark, like the bank teller who has that joyful personality. For example, he hired a woman from a local news station as his microkeratome technician, because she had tremendous eye-hand coordination and a fantastic attitude. According to Dr. Coleman, she is one of his best employees and now

GETTING INVOLVED IN THE COMMUNITY

By Stephen Coleman, MD

About 10 years ago, when Virginia Slims (Altria Group, New York, NY) halted its sponsorship of the Women's Professional Tennis Tournament, I saw an opportunity to get involved in my community. Coleman Vision (Albuquerque, NM) became the sponsor of the tennis tournament, now known as the *Colemanvision Tennis Championship*.

Every year since 1999, the Colemanvision Tennis Championship brings the next generation of Women's Grand Slam tennis players to New Mexico to compete in what the US Tennis Association rates as one of the top five tournaments in the nation. The event is held each fall, 3 weeks after the conclusion of the US Open. The Colemanvision Tennis Championship attracts high-profile players from more than 30 countries worldwide.

The tournament, however, means more to the community than bringing exceptionally talented international tennis players to town. Proceeds in the past have gone to the

Special Olympics. Now, the Southwest Tennis Foundation, a nonprofit organization established to promote and develop tennis at the midschool level, is the sole beneficiary. The foundation currently serves more than 3,000 students across a broad range of ethnic and economic groups and represents many of the broader objectives of the tournament. The idea is to put tennis racquets into the hands of at-risk kids to give them a positive activity to carry forward into adulthood. Other events during tournament week typically include a wheelchair tennis exhibition, a Native American junior clinic, and a middle school clinic with the pros.

The sponsorship of the tournament is a labor of love and a way to maintain a presence in the community. I did not lock myself into the sponsorship with the hope that my phone would ring off the hook with new patients. The tournament is not necessarily a direct advertising medium for my practice but rather a way of trying to make a positive impact in a relatively poor state filled with wonderful people.

runs his Intralase laser (Intralase Corp., Irvine, CA). He also never places undue importance on the background of a potential employee with respect to ophthalmic certifications but instead chooses to concentrate on what specific role that person would play in a LASIK practice. Training is intensive and practically on a daily basis.

ADAPTABILITY

Maximum flexibility is key to keeping employees happy. No one staff member works a full week (Monday through Friday) at our facility. All employees' schedules are commonly based upon ongoing changes in their lives, whether one has just had a child and needs to be home at a certain time or a different family situation, such as an aging parent that requires home care. Employees in the aforementioned situations may require a specific work schedule that allows them to take more time off to tend to personal matters, and we accept that. Some employees work 40 hours per week split into 4 10-hour days. Others are permitted to work only 32 hours per week. We view such arrangements as something like a promotion, because the employees are happy and working less but getting paid the same. This flexibility keeps them motivated.

COMPENSATION AND PERKS

Paying your employees for a job well done is obviously very important. We do not pay employees an incentive for booking a specific number of surgeries. Rather, we offer additional compensation whenever we see fit and sometimes just because. For instance, we may pick up the tab when staff members are going out for dinner, or, if someone is going away on vacation, we frequently pay for their airline tickets.

CONCLUSION

Our practice is still small enough that we have not had to implement standard operating procedures. A Mom-and-Pop mentality has really paid off for us in terms of employees' loyalty and productivity. We do not micromanage our workers, because they are well aware of their duties and our expectation that they will be completed. Supervisors and staff maintain a trusting relationship. ■

Stephen Coleman, MD, is Director of Coleman Vision in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Dr. Coleman may be reached at (505) 821-8880; stephen@colemanvision.com.



Ann Coleman Speer is Director of Operations at Coleman Vision in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Ms. Speer may be reached at (505) 821-8880; ann@colemanvision.com.