

CLEVELAND EYE CLINIC

A family atmosphere breeds camaraderie.

BY WILLIAM F. WILEY, MD

In a dynamic and quickly evolving economy, it is often difficult to attract and keep the most competent employees. Employee retention affects your company culture, and it is an often overlooked key to maintaining a successful practice. One helpful strategy to ensure that your valued employees aren't lost to another medical practice is to promote a family atmosphere.

Leaders in many practices that are going through a growth phase by building new offices or acquiring existing practices realize that the positive work environment they created in their small practice is difficult to carry over as the business grows. Growing pains often affect communication among all levels of staff, contributing to a breakdown of systems that trickles down to influence the quality of patient care.

High employee turnover is not only detrimental to the positive culture of a practice, it is also costly. It puts strain on the staff members who stick with you, as they can become frustrated

and struggle with additions to their already heavy workloads. Turnover like this builds resentment and interferes with communication and teamwork, leaving you with an unhappy staff. Further, if your most competent employees leave because they are unhappy, the success of your business is at risk. On the other hand, a highly competent, engaged, and happy staff allows the physician to practice more efficiently and the business to grow.

BEING PROACTIVE

As the business of health care becomes more competitive, there are more venues for employees to speak out regarding environment issues at their workplace. Negative online postings or complaints on social media can have the potential to decrease employee engagement.

We have found that it is important to be proactive rather than reactive. We make a concerted effort to promote a positive work culture by creating a family atmosphere in our offices.

Building camaraderie results in a high-functioning team. Communication flows freely, and employees work at their best. The focus shifts from negative work experiences to career satisfaction, which is crucial to a positive culture and, ultimately, to the quality of patient care.

ENCOURAGING ENGAGEMENT

To encourage teamwork, we cross-train employees at all levels. Cross-training, although it may seem at first glance to be job-threatening, allows employees to pitch in when needed because they have the knowledge to do so. When employees step up to fill in for others, they soon learn that what goes around comes around. This turns thoughts of "that is not my job" into offers to help their work family.

Growth of our practice over recent years has resulted in more opportunities for upward mobility within the practice, so we have had the ability to give talented and ambitious employees the chance to take on more responsibility. This has in turn resulted

Cleveland 2018

Staff members ► took to the Nautica Queen on a Cleveland Eye Clinic social event.



The Cleveland office took everyone out for an afternoon on the Nautica Queen.



Randie and Dr. Chester are at the Nautica Queen.

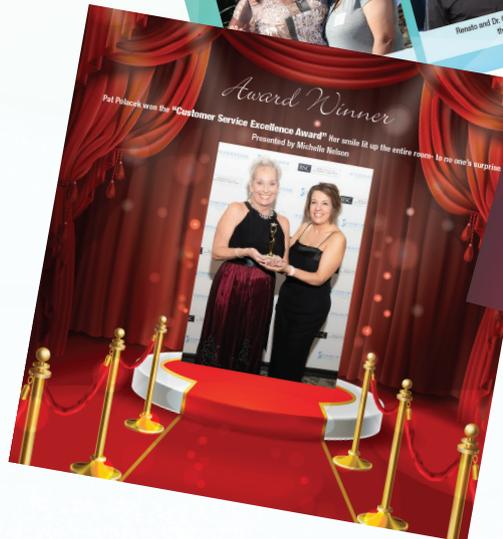


Oliver was just a puppy, but she did her best to make our waiting feel calm.

This year, we invited some furry friends who volunteer as therapy dogs to spend time with our patients. Therapy dogs have a calming effect on patients.

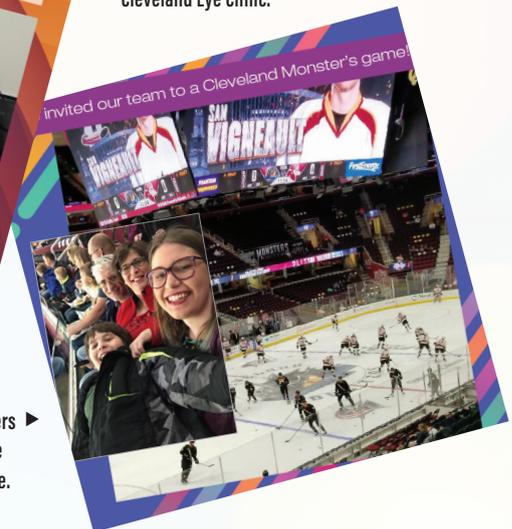
Dr. Wiley takes a moment before surgery to make friends with Valerius the Pit Bull.

► Therapy dog day at Cleveland Eye Clinic.



► One of the staff awards given out at the practice's 2018 holiday party.

Staff members ► at a local ice hockey game.



invited our team to a Cleveland Monster's game.

in better retention. Employees invested in their careers and their company realize that there are growth opportunities within the practice so there is no need to leave.

To encourage employee engagement, we took a tip from Vance Thompson Vision: We hold company-wide social events that include staff and their families when appropriate. These outings allow staff members to bond, build memories, and develop mutual respect.

Because our practice has eight locations, we have eight social events each year. We allow each center to plan one event per year and invite the entire company. These events have included summer picnics, a trip to the local zoo and rainforest, a river cruise, bowling, and toboggan ride excursions. We also have an annual holiday party at which we issue awards, complete with red

carpet, that the employees have voted on. The prizes are given in categories such as "best car," "class clown," and "most innovative."

Each year we also produce a company yearbook featuring headshots of all employees plus photos captured at the year's work events (see above for pages from Cleveland Eye Clinic's 2018 yearbook). This helps memorialize the positive experiences the teams have had over the year, and the annual release creates bonding experiences and reminiscences among the staff members over the past year's events. Sometimes employees even have other staff members sign their yearbooks.

POSITIVE CULTURE, POSITIVE IMPACT

We have found that a positive work culture that embodies a family atmosphere breeds engaged and happy employees. A happy staff, in turn, has

a positive impact on patient care while lowering costs and reducing employee turnover. We value our staff members, and we strive to show them that they are appreciated and that we realize their combined efforts are crucial to high-quality patient care and the success of the business. ■



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