Train to retain: keep your staff motivated

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Over the past decade the Australian job market has become increasingly tight, with unemployment now at just 4.5 per cent. While this is great for people looking for a job, it will put pressure on employers to find new ways to retain good staff. As this unemployment trend is expected to continue over the next 15 years, prepare for staff retention to become more difficult.

The average amount of time a staff member will stay with your pharmacy is two years. Finding and training new staff members is expensive and time consuming. Statistics show the cost is equivalent to 65 per cent of their annual salary. Based on average salaries this is around $24,515 and that is before you consider the loss of talent, loss of intellectual property and business intelligence of your pharmacy/customers, your competitors gaining your loss, the disruption to your current team and the expenses involved in training someone new. And after all that the new person may not even work out! This means keeping your staff happy and satisfied has to become a high priority.

Staff in any workplace need the right skills to effectively maintain a work/life balance, have access to training specialists in their field and be rewarded through team-building programs to foster a positive and satisfying working environment. All this boils down to one thing: training.

Orientation

Many pharmacy owners think staff training only involves day-to-day issues and product training – a common mistake that can cost you dearly. At a minimum an effective training program should consist of three components: Orientation/inductions for new employees; training for new employees; and continual training and development strategies for all staff.

Orienting new employees is often overlooked by employers. It is no longer enough to have a manual/handbook when you are introducing new employees to your pharmacy.

> **"An effective training program should consist of three components: orientation, training and development strategies."**

While this is a good reference guide (provided the information is readily accessible with the use of current and appropriate language that all staff can understand), it is essential to integrate manuals/handbooks with orientation programs and on-the-job training.

Many of our pharmacy candidates say their previous roles were a nightmare and they left for a more rewarding role. Liam*, a pharmacist in Melbourne's south east suburbs, did not receive any orientation in his last role and felt like he was thrown in the deep end, forced to sink or swim. Lack of an orientation program or poor orientation programs will leave your new employees feeling confused, uninspired and more than likely to last less than a year with your pharmacy.

When designing an orientation program you should include why you are in business, the history of your pharmacy, your values and who is who in your pharmacy (both staff and customers). This helps new staff find their feet and determine their place within your pharmacy, which is crucial in the settling in period. Starting a new role can be terrifying so an orientation program will help settle newcomers' nerves. Employees who receive valuable orientation learn a lot quicker and develop clear realistic expectations for their roles/responsibilities which they can meet effectively.

A winning orientation program will help decrease staff turnover and develop positive attitudes and higher job satisfaction amongst staff. Whether your orientation is done in-house or externally through an HR consultant, it will definitely improve your retention of staff, increase your employee's productivity and the pharmacy's profitability.

Specific roles

The second part of the training process involves preparing new employees for their specific role and aligning their position with your systems. Every pharmacy is different in the smallest yet most significant ways – a grade 2 pharmacy assistant in another pharmacy may not have the same responsibilities as your grade 2 pharmacy assistants. To prevent confusion and miscommunication, a formal employee training program should be in place, clearly outlining roles and responsibilities. All staff should know how their role ties in with the rest of the pharmacy so they understand the impact of their input and contribution to the overall success of your pharmacy.

One of the most successful ways to train and motivate new staff is to have them work alongside an existing staff member, providing them with 'on the job training'. This allows new employees to see the different working aspects of your pharmacy and enables them to form positive working relationships one-on-one with their colleagues.

Follow up

It is estimated that new employees retain up to 40 per cent of the information learnt in their initial training sessions. This is why the third part of the training process is critical. All businesses need continual training and development strategies to constantly upskill staff for their personal and professional development. Professional development training has obvious benefits but this alone will only enable your staff to do their jobs a bit better. It is the added personal development training that will give your staff the ability to think outside the square, tackle problems head on and think creatively.

Training programs are most beneficial when they are specifically tailored to an employee's professional and personal needs. What areas do your staff want to expand on and develop? Performance appraisals are a great way to determine common areas where your staff may be lacking training/expertise. Alternatively employees can anonymously volunteer suggestions for training they would like to receive. Staff will generally be more open and honest about their shortcomings if they are not singled out for disclosing their perceived weaknesses.

Motivating staff can be a struggle in any industry. The key is to keep training varied and enjoyable. Many pharmacies choose to hire human resources specialists to inspire staff and run team-building exercises. This can be done through a variety of training workshops such as talks, debates, brainstorming exercises, games and competitions. Creative training modules are informative yet light and fun – if the module is delivered in a lively and even animated manner it is more likely to be remembered and incorporated in your staff's daily activities.

The results you receive from planned orientation, new employee training and continual development training measures will pay for themselves! Not only will your employees strengthen their skills but they will be balanced individuals with higher job satisfaction. Ultimately your pharmacy will be winning against the struggle many other pharmacies face – staff retention will increase dramatically and so you will your profits.

Statistics based on research done by The Coi Group, Australia.

**Names have been changed for privacy reasons.*

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