



The Life Cycle of a Team: From Hiring to (Not) Firing

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Team members are the number one asset of any business, including veterinary practices. According to the Veterinary Hospital Manager's Association, 20% of a practice manager's responsibilities covers human resource management (HRM),¹ which includes searching for new team members, recruiting and interviewing, onboarding and training new hires,

coaching and discipline, engagement, performance reviews, and termination.

Recruiting new team members is not only costly, but it can also have a negative effect on the rest of the team. Implementing better recruiting techniques can reduce team member turnover and allow more time, money and effort to be invested in current team members, improving the practice culture and the overall health of the practice.

Breaking down each of the HRM processes and studying the cycle of a team member will help keep team members satisfied and reduce turnover. Hiring new employees starts way before the interview process and even before the ad placement. Identifying what the practice needs and defining the job duties, skill level needed, and ideal schedule are just a few details that pave the way to the search for the perfect candidate.

The Search

The search includes finding and reaching candidates that potentially fit the needs of the practice, from the skills set to the team culture. Do not waste time inviting an unqualified applicant to participate in the recruitment process. This includes someone who cannot work on Saturdays if that is what the practice needs most. Instead, filter candidates by strategically creating and placing ads to purposely attract candidates who are strong prospects.

Recruitment

Gone are the times when more than 30 applicants left management with a tough decision between the top 2 candidates. Times are changing and candidates move quickly, so employers must, too. Text messages instead of phone calls for pre-employment communication and shorter employment applications eliminating the request for job history that is already listed on attached resumes are more trendy methods. Asking for references in advance of the interview and preparing the candidate at the first interview to stay long enough for a Realistic Job Preview (RJP) (ie, a working interview) are tactics to move quickly through the process.

Using professional recruiters is also an option—with pros and cons. (See **Using Professionals to Recruit.**) Be organized with the hiring process by simply answering the who, what, when, where, and how questions.

Using Professionals to Recruit

Here is what you should know before choosing to hire a professional recruiter.

- What they do: Decipher what position the professional will recruit (eg, DVM, manager, supervisors, CSR, veterinary nurse, kennel assistant)
- Their relative professional experience: Veterinary recruiters will have industry-specific recruiting advantages (eg, recruiting sites, testing, questions specific to veterinary medicine)

Their fee structure: Depending on the recruiter, the fee structure may be a percentage of the annual salary or they may bill by time or by project (ie, when a team member is hired)

Pro & Con:

- Pro: Outsourcing a professional recruiter shifts the burden off the practice and allows the professional to do what he or she does best.
- Con: Trusting an outside source to hire for a practice culture he or she has not worked in or with can be risky.

Who?

According to Leadership IQ's author Mark Murphy, 46% of new hires fail because the practice manager overlooked poor communication skills or lack of or underdeveloped Emotional Intelligence during the recruitment process. Only 11% of that 46% fail because of a lack of technical skills.²

Selecting the right candidate is crucial and should be approached with caution. Consider hiring for good communication skills in addition to technical skills. Client service, team work, and patient care all require essential communication skills that can be assessed during the interview process. By asking strategic open-ended questions, candidates with poor communication skills can quickly be eliminated. Ask questions like these:

- *If you knew a manager was 100% wrong about something, how would you handle it?*
- *What is the most useful criticism or feedback you have received?*
- *Share with me a humbling experience that comes to mind.*

What?

The Job Analysis process outlines competencies required for that position and can facilitate the right fit between the job and the candidate. Include a job analysis exercise to help identify the

actual position the practice needs filled. Do some homework and gather information about the position by asking the incumbent the current duties. They may divulge tasks that are not observable. Question those who work directly with that position to understand what another department may need and what will make organization or communication more effective within the practice.

When?

Always be on the lookout for the right addition to the team. The practice may not have an opening, but there is always room for a new team member who is recommended and seems like he or she would fit perfectly, or close to perfectly. Hand out business cards to potential candidates at the grocery store, coffee house, or restaurant. A Starbucks barista who has outstanding client service skills and is always mentioning her favorite pet may be a perfect fit for the practice team. The dog walker who smiles while cleaning up after a pet on the sidewalk might be the next perfect kennel attendant.

Where?

Placing advertisements that are personalized to the practice is crucial for finding the right candidates. For example, for a busy single-veterinarian practice that sees lots of hairless cats and has quirky beach bum clients that needs a client service representative, the right fit would be an energetic, quirky beach bum who could make clients smile and feel at home. Then say so in the advertisement.

Many locations should be considered for an advertisement placement. (See **Where to Place an Ad.**) Also, always talk to team members, who may have friends or colleagues qualified for the new position.

Where to Place an Ad?

- The [AVMA's Veterinary Career Center](#)
- [AAHA's MyVetCareer](#)
- [iHireVeterinary](#)
- Local community colleges with veterinary nurse programs
- Local and state veterinary associations
- Local veterinary schools
- The practice's web site

- Online sites (eg, Craigslist,* Indeed, Monster, SimplyHired, ZipRecruiter)

- Social media (eg, LinkedIn, Facebook**)

*Craigslist provides a large applicant pool but many applicants may not have the necessary qualifications.

**Facebook leads may be clients and friends that can turn relationships sour if things do not work out.

Identification

How?

Two important methods for identifying the right candidate are writing an accurate job description and conducting the interview with the right questions.

Job Description

Team members need direction and instruction to do their jobs thoroughly and correctly. Providing a written outline of duties and responsibilities communicate the employer's expectations.

Use these approaches to fine-tune a job description.

- Observe the team member currently doing the job to be filled. What duties are being performed, or were performed before the team member left the practice?
- If possible, ask the current incumbent to write his or her job description before he or she leaves, or check that the job description in the practice guidelines is accurate. An itemized list of duties performed daily, weekly, and monthly would suffice.
- Ask several team members who have similar responsibilities to write the job description. The practice manager should review and approve the description.
- Interview current team members who will interact with the new hire and get their opinion on the kind of person needed for the open position.

Interview

Once a candidate, or perhaps 2, has been found, now what?

The interview, the next step in the recruiting process, itself involves many tools (eg, the application, phone interview, in-person interview, personality assessment, skills assessment) that help ensure the right fit for the practice is hired. (See **Benchmarks**.)

BENCHMARKS

Good Questions = Good Interviews

- Ideal candidates likely have the necessary medical skills, but that may not mean they will be a good fit for the practice's workplace values and culture. Behavioral interview questions can get you out of candidate interview purgatory and into real-conversation heaven.
- Effective interviews include questions to gauge abilities related to problem-solving, teamwork, team communication, motivation, integrity, planning and organization, client communication, relationship-building skills, personal qualities, leadership, and adaptability.

SOURCE: Hock J, Guercio-Winter M. *Benchmarks 2016: A Study of Well-Managed Practices*. Columbus, OH: WTA Veterinary Consultants and Advanstar Publishing; 2016:71-73.

Conclusion

There is no perfect recipe for finding the right candidate but following a process can help. Perhaps add one more step and evaluate team member retention by taking time to learn the reason why the current team member is leaving and how turnover can be reduced.

The life cycle of a team does not end after members are hired. Invest in the most valuable assets the practice has already in place—the team.

TAKE ACTION

- 1** Keep investing in the practice's team members after they are hired to reduce team member turnover.
- 2** Get input from current team members who will interact with the new hire to get an accurate job description and the skill set the new hire will need to fit in with the rest of the team.

REFERENCES

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Andrea Crabtree, CVPM, PHR, PHRca, a Southern California native, became a Certified Veterinary Practice Manager in 2011 and currently owns FurPaws Consulting in Orange, California, where she works with practice owners and hospital managers to develop their team and expand and develop the business. She also received her certification as a Professional in Human Resources in 2016, and as a California Professional in Human Resources in 2017. She earned a bachelor of science degree in animal health science from Cal Poly Pomona in 2004. In January 2016, she received the Southern California Veterinary Medical Association Paraprofessional of the Year Award. She is a frequent speaker, lecturer, and coach, and a member of several professional associations.

FUN FACT: Andrea lives with her husband, Andrew, son, John, 2 cats, and 2 dogs. She loves professional football and the Green Bay Packers have been her favorite team since she was 4 years old. She also loves to hike, bike, run, and swim, and go to Disneyland.

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