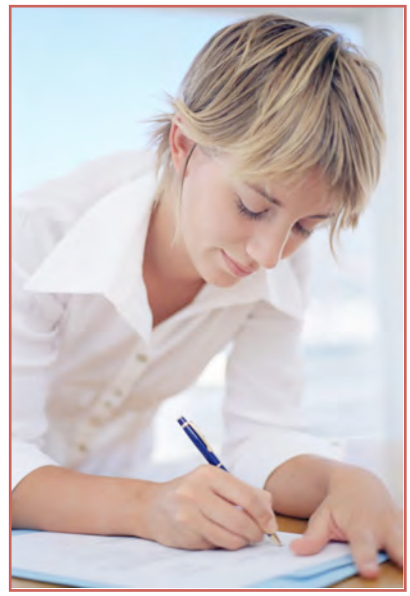


describe the employee's tasks, duties, and responsibilities. For example, compare the statement "Sets appointment schedule" to "Calls client at home, talks to them about scheduling their pet for spay or neuter and writes it in the schedule book." While the second statement is much more detailed and better describes exactly what the employee is doing, it is just as important to avoid the trap of writing much more than necessary. The statement "Walks to the filing cabinet, opens drawer, pulls folder out, and inserts material in correct folder" is an extreme example of how a task is actually done but a better way to phrase the same thing is "Files correspondence to maintain accurate customer records." This statement is sufficiently descriptive without being overly detailed.

Step 4: Add a disclaimer

Most clinics operate in a team-oriented work environment and you can't possibly list every task that an employee may be asked to do. The job description is not designed to cover or contain a comprehensive listing of activities, duties or responsibilities that are required by the employee holding the position. Most job descriptions nowadays include a line that the position requirements include "and all other duties as assigned by your supervisor." It is also recommended to add language that allows you to add to, change and interpret the position description as necessary and to clarify that the job description is not a contract and may be adjusted as the clinic deems appropriate in their sole discretion.

For example,

"The employer shall, in its discretion, modify or adjust the position to meet the clinic's changing needs."

"This job description is not a contract and may be adjusted as necessary at the sole discretion of the employer."

Step 5: Add signature lines

Signatures are an important part of validating the job description. They show that the job description has been approved by the manager and that the employee understands the requirements, essential functions and duties of the position. Anytime the job description changes or a new hire starts their employment, the manager and employee should review and sign the job description together. This ensures that the employee is starting off their new position with a thorough understanding of the position requirements and the dialogue opens the door for the manager and employee to discuss the performance expectations.

Step 6: Finalize

The employee's signed job description should be kept in their employee file. A template can be kept in a secure location with copies used for interviews and to create performance appraisals. Employers may also wish to post all job descriptions on the company's intranet. It depends on the communication style, needs and culture of your clinic.

Establishing Competitive Pay and Benefits

Establishing pay scales and salary rates for jobs is not as easy as it might sound at first. There is a delicate balance between being able to attract and retain good workers and being able to balance the annual budget. Research has shown that as long as the pay scale is appropriate and fair for the position, it is not the most important factor in keeping employees' satisfied.

However, the pay scale must be in line with similar jobs and be seen as appropriate in order to attract good candidates and to retain great staff. In order to develop pay scales for all positions, you must first establish a compensation philosophy. This is a reflection of the clinic's strategy as it relates to pay, and also provides a foundation for each subsequent step in the efforts to establish your salary/pay-scale plan.

Step 1: Establish your philosophy

The first step is to articulate the clinic philosophy of the salary/pay-scale program. The philosophy incorporates both direct (cash compensation) and indirect (health benefits, vacation, etc.) compensation, and relates back to the underlying characteristics, objectives, and philosophy of your clinic. It can also be helpful to think about your geographic environment, competition for workers, the clinic mission and objectives, and the role that each of these will play in establishing your salary/pay-scale plan.

There are other issues to consider when establishing your salary/pay-scale plan, including:

- Prevailing federal and state minimum wage rates
- The clinic's annual budget
- The clinic's ability to support increases or bonuses to pay
- The clinic's culture and mission
- Your geographic market and competition for similar workers

Setting salaries is an important, yet tricky task. You don't want to pay someone too little, as you may not attract or retain the best talent. On the other hand, paying too much for your employees can strain your budget.

Some questions to ask yourself and your Board of Directors when setting pay rates and salaries are:

- Does our compensation philosophy reflect the mission, culture, strategic objectives and views of our clinic?
- Can we afford it?
- Is it reasonably competitive within our labor market?
- Is it fair (both inside the clinic and out)?
- Does it reinforce retention?
- Will it recognize and reward achievements and quality of performance?

- Does the system ensure consistency with applicable laws and regulations, such as the Equal Pay Act and the Fair Labor Standards Act?

Step 2: Create a list of all of the positions needed within the clinic

To come up with an hourly pay rate of salary for a new position, it's a good idea to:

- Create a job description to define exactly what work the person will be doing
- Decide whether you need the position to be part-time or full-time
- Determine if the position qualifies for an overtime exemption
- Research what others in the area are paying for similar positions
- Check similar employment listings on sites such as www.salary.com and www.GlassDoor.com
- Find out whether competitors provide health insurance, retirement plans, bonuses or other benefits
- Your Board of Directors may be able to help by sharing pay scales for similar positions in their companies
- Determine how much of your budget should be dedicated to payroll expenses
- Set a pay range, with a minimum/maximum salary that you afford to pay, so you can adjust your offer based on the candidate's skills and experience

Step 3: Evaluate the jobs

You can either use non-quantitative (no numerical result) or quantitative methods to evaluate your jobs. The non-quantitative methods include: Ranking, Classification and Sorting. The quantitative methods include a Factor Comparison and Point Factor methods.

One way to evaluate your positions is to use a Ranking process and rank order them in terms of the level of skill, education, responsibility, supervisory duties and accountability each position holds. The positions can be ranked by either one person (Clinic Director) or by a committee made up of knowledgeable individuals (Clinic Director and two members of the Board of Directors). When working with a committee or group, if there are any discrepancies in each individual's rankings for a position, they should be discussed until the group reaches consensus. Upon completion of the rankings, it will be clear which position requires the highest level of skill, ability and knowledge and should have the highest pay rate or salary. Conversely, it will be easy to see which position requires the least level of skill and expertise and should be paid at the lower pay level at the clinic.

Step 4: Collect benchmark data on positions in your clinic

It is important to know what others are paying for the same position or equivalent work that your position requires. Some positions, such as Office Manager, are quite common and you can find salary information on this position and use that as your benchmark. You may also be able to find pay rates for specialized positions, such as Vet Tech, online through an online recruiter or salary program.

Once you have a ballpark amount for a benchmarked position, you can decide whether your compensation philosophy is:

- Lead the market,
- Meet the market, or
- Lag the market

Each philosophy carries with it both pros and cons and it is important to review your overall clinic mission and philosophy about quality vs. budget in order to decide where to set your pay rates.

You'll also want to make sure you develop your pay ranges to allow for other contingencies such as:

- Merit increases
- Transfers
- Promotions
- Upgrade in position
- Downgrade in position
- Exceptions

Step 5: Set the pay rates and salaries based on position requirements, job rankings and benchmarks

The easiest way to do this is to rank your jobs in terms of the difficulty, responsibility and knowledge required. Benchmark the positions that are common to all businesses (i.e., Office Manager, Administrative Assistant) and those that are more specific to the nonprofit spay/neuter industry (i.e., Veterinarians, Vet Techs). This will give you a hierarchical listing of all of your positions with associated pay rates/salaries.

Paying Employees

Be sure to review all of the pertinent legal and financial information regarding paying employees. You'll need to ensure that you are correctly handling withholding taxes, overtime and meal breaks according to the applicable federal or state laws. It's also a good idea to have any overtime exemptions documented for the positions with an exemption and the type of exemption.

Recruiting Sources and Strategies

Attracting qualified candidates can be challenging and often requires creativity and planning. When deciding the most appropriate method to recruit qualified candidates, the following factors should be considered:

- Overall difficulty in the past of finding qualified applicants
- Location of your clinic and the surrounding labor market
- Level of the position to be filled
- Pay and benefits
- Promotion policies
- Time and budget constraints
- Special technical requirements

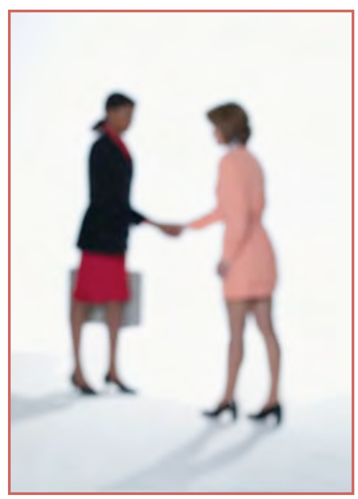
The Recruiting Process

The process of locating qualified applicants to interview for available job openings is the first step in the hiring process. Before setting about to start recruiting, you must first evaluate the position and either create a job description or review the current one to ensure that it is still relevant and up-to-date. Your recruiting ads should be based on an accurate job description and include current requirements and needs.

A successful recruiting program ensures a good pool of qualified candidates to choose from. This will increase the chances of selecting an individual with the skills, knowledge and ability to become a successful employee and a valuable asset to your clinic. A recruiting strategy is like developing a clinic marketing campaign. You need to determine the best, most efficient ways to "market" your clinic to your community of applicants. Not only do you need to know where to find them, you have to also know what they are looking for and how you can meet their needs and wants.

There are several methods you can use to solicit applicants for your open position:

1. Traditional method – advertising in the paper



Many applicants still search the old tried-and-true classified ads in the local newspaper. Sundays are typically the most popular day for people looking for work to peruse the job ads section of the paper. Think carefully about how to word the ad so you receive applications from applicants who, at least, meet the minimum qualifications for your job. It can be an expensive method of advertising so you'll need to get the right message across using the least amount of words. See a sample job ad for a Vet Tech at the end of this section.

2. Internet Recruiting – advertising online

There are many free or pay-for-posting services to advertise online and this is a good way to reach candidates who depend on technology for their information. This method isn't always as quick as the Sunday newspaper ad because you have to wait for candidates to access the information; however, it can be very cost-effective and allow you to include more information about your mission to draw candidates who will be a good fit. And, whenever your recruiting can be targeted to people who have an interest in your type of work, the chances of finding a good fit increase.

A free targeted internet recruiting site is: www.animalsheltering.org

Some free internet recruiting sites include: www.craigslist.com, www.ihire.com, www.simplyhired.com

Some popular fee-based internet recruiting sites include: www.monster.com, www.careerbuilder.com, www.hotjobs.com.

3. Targeted Recruiting - direct communications

Another approach to recruiting is a proactive process of researching and targeting key individuals in the community or even at competitors, and directly approaching them about the opportunities within your clinic. Building relationships in the community and other local networking activities can provide you with a number of good leads for possible candidates.

4. Recruiting Networks & Employee Referrals - building relationships

In spite of all of the recruiting, most people report that they find their jobs through personal contacts and networking, which can be great methods to recruit qualified candidates. Often the person who is referring someone he/she knows has already assessed whether the candidate will be a good fit for your clinic.

Professional organizations, local or national depending on the position, such as the National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America (NAVTA, www.navta.net) or the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA, www.avma.org) are great sources, but you can also create your own network. Colleagues you constantly run into at various professional functions or local contacts at other non-profits are a good place to start.

In addition, your clinic can focus on developing relationships with the community and local colleges and high schools to build networks. By developing a tie with a particular instructor or career counselor, you can create a direct line to a highly desirable pool of talent. Networking is a cost-free way to have others assist you in your search for qualified candidates.

Employee referrals are a great way to reach the friends, family, and acquaintances of your employees and volunteers. They are one of the best sources because they know both your culture and the personality of the applicant and can determine if their referral would be a good match in your work environment. Research has shown that retention rates are higher for employees who have been referred by another employee. One word of caution: when hiring the friends and/or relatives of employees, you need to careful. The employee can recommend someone, but it is your job to do a thorough screening to determine if they are the best candidate for the position. All parties must be aware that this is a business environment and they will be held to performance and behavior standards like all other employees. And, it is never a good idea to have anyone reporting to a relative – this is why most companies have policies about hiring relatives of employees (see Sample Nepotism Policies in Appendix).

5. Internal Promotions – hiring from within

Sometimes your best source for good candidates for an opening is actually within your own workforce. Internal promotions help you keep your best employees by giving them a new opportunity within your clinic. Also, this process helps to meet the staffing needs of a growing clinic with new locations or changing operations. It allows you to readjust your work processes or scale down areas that have declining need while keeping good employees. A great benefit to promoting/cross-developing good employees is that your "new hire" is already familiar with your culture, goals, and mission, so you avoid the initial learning curve that all new hires experience during their first six months to a year. And, you are developing an employee who is familiar with multiple areas of the clinic. Other benefits include increased employee satisfaction and commitment and lower staffing costs.

Be sure to adhere to your policies for qualifications on various positions such as: a credit screen for someone moving into a financial position or an evaluation period for someone moving into a new position.

RECRUITING VETERINARIANS

Veterinarians are vital to the success of your clinic; however, it can be challenging to recruit, hire and retain good veterinarians. For more detailed information on the specifics of recruiting, hiring and retaining vets, see Dr. James Wheedon's comprehensive guide entitled, "Strategies for Recruiting and Retaining Spay/Neuter Veterinarians."

One clinic has utilized a successful recruiting method of asking all veterinarians in the community to sit on a committee to help them find a vet for the clinic. The committee is given information about the clinic and the mission and asked to pass on the information to anyone they know who may be interested.

6. Making the Most of Your Marketing Dollars – adding job ads onto other communications

Part of recruiting is to market your clinic to potential employees, something you can do through your normal direct mail communications. If you send postcards or newsletters or other forms of communication to a list of interested parties, consider adding information about potential job opportunities at the same time. Direct mail marketing of your clinic to a targeted group of individuals not only markets your clinic but can also attract interested applicants who already have an interest in your mission. You can also purchase lists of individuals who have a certain occupation or specialty and send out targeted materials on open positions or invite them to job fairs that you may be attending. However, this approach can be very costly which is why it is suggested as an add-on to a marketing strategy – it will help you capture the biggest return on your marketing dollars.

7. Your Own Signage - billboards or local radio and television

Another recruiting option is to utilize your existing media to advertise openings and attract candidates. People drive by your clinic every day and even if they aren't interested, they may know someone who is. The challenge is to create a short, eye-catching advertisement that includes the information they need to know how to apply.

You may also be able to get free or low-cost ads on local radio or television stations who support non-profits in the area. This allows you to reach a large number of candidates – but be prepared for an overwhelming response.

In addition to the reaching a large number of people, you will also be marketing your clinic and mission. This is important in shaping the image of the clinic in the community and imaging is important to your overall success in attracting good employees, marketing your services and developing a community presence for fundraising efforts.

8. Local Job Fairs – good for multiple openings or interns

Local job fairs in the community are a good way to reach people interested in a job now. You get an opportunity to meet a large number of potential candidates for a brief amount of time, and it gives you a good idea of who to invite in for a longer interview. Typically, the clinic would rent a booth at the fair and staff it with representatives of the clinic. Again, it's important to use the opportunity to allow potential candidates to view the purpose and mission of your clinic and to design a great table display with materials that markets your mission to all.

SAMPLE JOB AD FOR A VETERINARY TECHNICIAN

Want to Make a Difference?

A mission-based nonprofit spay and neuter clinic needs you to help stop animal overpopulation in our community. If a job that is set in a fast-paced, fun-filled environment where you can make a difference appeals to you then read on…

Sample Humane Clinic is looking to add to our superior team by adding a Veterinary Technician to assist in surgeries and client care. Minimum qualifications include: current certification with three years experience. If you have dynamic qualities, a desire to succeed, and are looking for full-time or part-time work in an environment that makes a positive change in your future and the future of your community, contact Sample Humane Clinic. We offer competitive wages, benefits and much more! DFWP/EOE

Other recruiting ideas:

- Give prizes to employees who refer applicants who are hired.
- Give recognition to the employee referral process with stories of successful employee referrals during board meetings and in newsletters.
- Create and maintain a Job Board on your clinic website that allows interested people to find out about openings and download an application.

Employment Applications

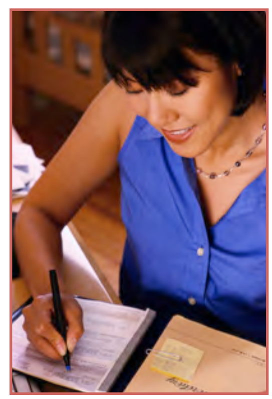
Employment applications are a great source of information both for you about the applicant, but also for the applicant about your clinic and work culture. It is an important communication tool for a number of reasons.

1. Applications request the same information from each candidate.

All applicants should complete an application as the first step in applying for a position with your clinic. You may receive resumes from individuals who want to apply for your position and, while resumes are valuable sources of information, they are created by the applicant and include the information that the applicant feels is important or is the information they want you to know about them. Applications, on the other hand, have a series of questions that all applicants answer which will provide you consistent information that you can compare from candidate to candidate.

2. The application must be signed and dated to be considered a completed application.

Information supplied on a resume may or may not be truthful. Many resumes contain incomplete, inaccurate or downright false information. Applications, on the other hand, have a statement of accuracy and a place for applicants to sign that they are attesting that the information is truthful, accurate and correct. Do not consider an application as a viable application for employment unless it is complete, and is signed and dated by the candidate.



An employer can state that falsification of information on the application will prevent hiring and could result in termination should it be identified later. It is important to note that an employer should enforce this requirement in every case. Failure to apply it to every case could set the employer up for a discriminatory enforcement charge.

3. Include the proper questions and disclaimers.

Disclaimers on employment applications offer employer protections that range from saving time and money by hiring the right employees to avoiding potential employment litigation and liability. Common disclaimers include statements that the application or other written documents do not create an employment contract.

There are many commercial companies that sell generic application forms that you can purchase and customize with your clinic name and logo. A few companies that provide human resource and employment forms (including pre-made application forms) are www.GNeil.com and www.laborlawcenter.com. You can create your own application form as long as you include the proper verbiage and questions (see www.samplewords.com/professional-job-application-form.html).

Review the application forms of a variety of other companies including nonprofits or local companies in your area to see what kinds of questions they are asking on their employment applications. This may give you a good start to developing your own format, style and question list.

4. Ask the questions you need all applicants to answer.

Include information that you will need in order to determine if the applicant is a qualified candidate for your position. Most applications include information to contact and identify the applicant, prior employment information, education and skills, certifications or other job relevant information. There should be a place for the applicant to disclose if they have been convicted of criminal offenses, a statement of accuracy, and a place for them to sign that they are attesting to the accuracy and truthfulness of the information. Falsifying an application can be a reason for termination.

5. DON'T ask questions that you don't need.

While not unlawful to do so, due to identity theft and general privacy concerns, employers generally should not request information not needed on an employment application form. Applications are often viewed by individuals who do not have a need to know this information. An employment application should request only information directly related to an applicant's ability to perform a specific job. As a general practice, employers should request a social security number only when absolutely necessary, e.g., in conjunction with a background check, completing a W-4, or when enrolling the employee into benefits plans. This information should be requested separate from the employment application, and safeguards should be in place to protect and keep this information confidential. Employers should also implement procedures for safe disposal of this information once an employment decision has been made.

6. Use the application as a way to communicate your clinic culture to applicants.

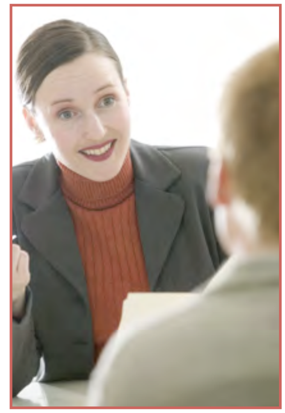
If your clinic conducts background checks or reference checks on all applicants, a statement about background checks can be included. Some work rules such as a smoke-free workplace may also be mentioned on the application. Make applicants aware and ensure they agree to comply with rules they could later deem too restrictive. You can also include your mission statement on your application form – this gives applicants an opportunity to learn more about what you value and to self-select out of the employment process if your clinic isn't what they're looking for.

(See Sample Job Application Forms in Appendix).

Effective Interviewing

"Hire smart, or manage tough."
-Red Scott

Interviews are still the most widely used method for a director to evaluate the candidates' qualifications, skills, abilities, and other characteristics and compare them to the needs of the job. Most applicants are familiar with the interview process. It is an excellent way to evaluate each of the qualified candidates and determine which, if any, is the right candidate for the position. Interviews done well will be a successful exchange of information between you and the candidate, allowing both of you to be able to make a sound employment decision; however, interviews done wrong can be a huge waste of time, not to mention a potential legal headache!



As you begin recruiting and interviewing employees, you may be drawn to certain candidates because of their experience, educational background and personality. While it's easy to get swayed by a candidate who interviews well, it's important to make a selection decision based on the requirements for the position. Employees are a culmination of what you see and also what you don't see. And, some candidates are just really good at interviewing but don't have the skills, abilities and other personal characteristics to be successful at work. It's wise to think through what you need in your employees and develop a strategy to ensure that you consider what's important in all of your new hires.

Interviews can create a myriad of problems for you as a clinic Director. One inappropriate question could be the basis for a discrimination lawsuit. It's always best to prepare for every interview by starting with an Interview Guide that consists of a list of job-related questions that you ask each candidate. Ensure that the Interview Guide you use only asks for job-related information designed to help you identify the best candidate during the selection process. There is no need to ask any questions not directly related to the candidate's ability to perform the job. Every question you ask should relate to the following: "How does your experience/education/skill level qualify you to perform this job?" Trouble starts when candidates are asked for information that is irrelevant to their ability to do the job.

First, we'll look at the interview process and then we'll cover what you should and shouldn't ask in an interview - we'll finish up with a review of the different types of interviews and how to do each.

The Interview Process

Interviews are structured conversations between you and the applicant with the major objective of evaluating the candidate's qualifications to determine if they are the best candidate for the position. How the interview process is planned and followed can make the difference between hiring the best candidate and just selecting one by instinct.

There are essentially three steps in the interview process

1. Preparing for the interview
2. Conducting the interview
3. Evaluating the interview

Preparing for the Interview

Probably the most important part of any interview is the advance preparation by the interviewer.

"If you don't know what you're looking for, how will you know when you've found it?"

Before the interview, you should have a completed application and perhaps a resume, depending on the candidate. The two essential pieces of information that must be reviewed prior to the interview are the job description and the application form. Your preparation should start with the job description because you need this information in order to determine the appropriate questions to include in your interview guide. The job description will tell you the duties and responsibilities of the job and the knowledge, skills, abilities, competencies and experience required to be successful on the job. You can easily create an interview guide based upon the information in the job description. This will ensure that you are measuring candidates against the requirements of the job and that your interview questions are job-related.

Some interviewers begin the interview with only a general idea of the questions they plan to ask. They may start with a general statement about the clinic and describe the requirements of the position. They may follow up with a broad statement such as, "Tell me about yourself." From the response, they follow up on various aspects of the candidate's background and explore them more fully. This may be okay for an experienced interviewer who uses this statement as an opening and has thought out what additional questions they need to ask. However, there is a danger that the applicant may tell you only what he or she wants you to hear, and you may never get around to asking about areas not mentioned. To avoid this problem, prepare your questions in advance. (see Sample Interview Guide in Appendix).

In addition to reviewing the application and preparing your interview guide, you should also prepare the interview environment. There are few things more distracting than a ringing phone or employee distractions during an interview. It gives the impression of a disorganized, undisciplined work environment and is not a good image to give a possible new employee. It is a sign of respect to the candidate to forward your phone to voicemail and to ask for privacy during the interview. By creating a distraction-free environment, and preparing fully for the interview, you will set the stage for a productive and successful exchange of information, and you are projecting an image of an organized, professional work environment to the candidate.

Conducting the Interview

When conducting the interview, remember - the first step is to provide a comfortable environment without interruptions or distractions. Your goal should be for the candidate to be comfortable in order to encourage an anxiety-free and conversational setting. Always greet the applicant, thank them for coming and try to build rapport through neutral comments ("Did you have any trouble finding the clinic?"). And finally, it is less like a formal interview and more conversational if you sit on the same side of the desk or at a conference table with the applicant.

As the interviewer, you should be in control of the interview at all times. Your primary goal is to obtain the information you need in order to determine if the applicant is qualified for your position. Your secondary goal is to "sell" the job to the applicant if they are a strong candidate. Therefore, you have to control the interview in order to ensure that your goals are met.

One way to ensure that you are in control is to provide the applicant with an overview of the interview process. Let the applicant know that you will begin the interview by asking them a series of questions to assess their qualifications for the position. Inform the candidate that you will be taking notes during the interview in order to better remember their responses. Tell the candidate that after you've gone through your questions, you will tell them about the clinic and the open position and finally, you will turn it over to them to ask any questions that they would like to ask. Also, let the applicant know how long you expect the interview process to take (i.e., about an hour).

Next, ask your prepared questions.

Your questions should be designed to determine:

> JOB REQUIREMENTS - Can they perform the requirements of the job?
>
> MOTIVATION - Are they motivated to perform well on the job?
>
> CULTURE FIT - Will they fit in with your clinic team?

To answer the question:

> Can they perform the requirements of the job? You will need to assess the level of their knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics such as: customer service skills, certifications, degrees, communication skills, computer skills, and equipment operation.
>
> Are they motivated to perform well on the job? You will need to determine if they will be satisfied in the position. Some examples of motivation include: enjoying their work, career ambition, initiative, desire for the job, and an appropriate match.
>
> Will they fit in with your clinic team? You will want to know if they will fit in with your clinic mission and the rest of the staff. This can be determined through measuring their level of cooperation, flexibility and adaptability, personal goals, peer relations and likability.

To evaluate the applicant's qualifications, questions should be developed to give you enough information to make a hiring decision. It is best to start off with broader questions to get an overview of the candidate's general level of performance and after you have assessed that they meet the requirements, you should be prepared to ask additional questions that will probe for very specific details.

Unless you are confirming that they candidate has a certain degree or is able to work overtime, it is usually more informative to ask open-ended questions. Open-ended questions usually begin with: who, what, where, when, why or how. This type of question enables the respondent to answer in an unstructured manner, thereby providing more information and answers that would not have been elicited from closed, yes/no questions. Instead of asking, "Do you like working with animals?" say, "Why do you want to work in a spay/neuter clinic?"

To get the most out of the interview, here are some guidelines to follow when asking questions:

- Don't ask questions that can be answered "Yes" or "No." To encourage the applicant to talk, use "Who, what, where, when, why, and how?"
- Don't answer questions for the candidate. Instead of asking, "You've handled a busy office before, haven't you?" say, "Tell me about the pace of the work at your last position."
- Don't use leading questions like, "Was your prior boss impressed with your performance?"
- Don't use theoretical questions like "How do you usually handle difficult co-workers?" Instead, ask for specifics such as, "Tell me about the most serious disagreement you had with a co-worker. What was the situation, how did you handle it, and how was it resolved?"
- Avoid hypothetical questions like, "What would you do if a customer was complaining to you?" It isn't necessarily an example of what the candidate has done, merely their conjecture as to what they would do if faced with the situation or, worse yet, what they think you want to hear.

Developing a list of appropriate questions is not easy. Here are some questions that can be used in an interview for almost any position within your clinic.

Appropriate experience levels: Describe your present responsibilities and duties. How does your background qualify you for this position? In what ways have your education and training prepared you for this job?

Job/person fit: Discuss some of the challenges you encounter on the job. What do you like most about your current (or most recent) job? What do you like least?

Initiative/motivation: What was your biggest accomplishment in your present job?

Interest in the position: Why did you apply for this job?

Initiative/problem-solving: If you were hired for this job, in what areas could you contribute immediately?

Judgment/interest in the position: In what areas would you need additional training?

Mission-based: We are a mission-based clinic which means that sometimes we have to take certain actions such as spaying a pregnant female animal or trapping feral animals for spay/neuter. This is part of the position. Do you support the clinic mission and will you be able to participate in pediatric surgeries, ear tipping, and surgeries on pregnant animals?

LESSONS LEARNED

According to a 2008 study by Leadership IQ, 82% of managers reported that, in reflection, the interview process could have been handled more effectively. They say they would've avoided certain mistakes had they taken the following steps: been more focused on the interview itself; listened more and talked less; spent more time on the actual interview; and had stronger interviewing abilities and experience.

After asking the applicant your prepared questions, take a few minutes to provide information about your clinic and the mission, the position, and a general review of the benefits you can offer. Answer any questions and let the applicant know when you will be contacting them again. It's best to tell candidates that your process may take a few weeks but that you will be back in touch with them one way or another. Then, thank them for coming in to speak with you and escort them to the door.

Evaluating the Interview

Take time immediately following the interview to summarize your notes. If you are asking similar questions of each applicant, the process will be much more objective, and it will be easier for you to make a decision. You will also want to meet with other clinic employees who may have interviewed the candidate as well.

Steps After the Interview

After concluding all of your interviews and evaluating your notes, you will probably have one candidate that has surfaced as the best candidate for the position and that you would like to hire for the position. Everyone is anxious to complete the process so don't delay.

1. Contact the top candidate and offer them the position. Once the candidate has accepted the position, you can create and send them an offer letter outlining the details of the offer (see Crafting Offer Letters).
2. Once the candidate has signed and returned your offer letter you can start the background and reference screening process, and the drug-testing process if applicable (see Background Checks, Drug Testing and Reference Checking & Giving).
3. The other applicants should be contacted to say, "Thank you for your time and interest; however, another applicant was a better match for the position." It is best to keep the response as general as possible and not give applicants specific reasons as to why they weren't hired. This can be done through a letter, email or phone call; however, a phone call leaves you open for more direct questions about the selection process (see "Not Hired" Sample Letters in Appendix).
4. As soon as all background screening is successfully completed, schedule the candidate for their first day of work! (See Orientation and Onboarding to plan for the new employee).

What You Can and Can't Ask in an Interview

Remember: federal and state laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of an applicant's race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age or disability. Some state laws also prohibit discrimination based on factors such as marital status or sexual orientation. If you ask a job applicant a question specifically relating to one of those characteristics, you're subject to being sued. Employee lawsuits tend to increase during recessions and this one is no exception.

Job discrimination claims filed by U.S. employees and applicants are running at record-high levels in the past two years. Managers and supervisors are at the front lines of making decisions that often trigger those lawsuits — promotions, pay raises, terminations and job assignments. But the most legally dangerous of all those situations is interviewing job candidates.

One misguided question could cause an applicant to think he or she was rejected due to one of the federally protected categories including: race, gender, disability, age, national origin, religion or pregnancy status. Even your most innocent questions ("It looks like you're limping – did you hurt your leg?") could be interpreted in a discriminatory way.

How to Ask Legally Safe Questions

Here are four sample questions that can be helpful in learning more about the candidate's qualifications for your position.

1. "Briefly, in the next few minutes, can you run down your prior work experience" or "Can you tell me about your work history and how it relates to this position." Open-ended questions can elicit more information than specific ones. When answering that kind of question, the information that a candidate chooses to focus on can be very informative. Listen for statements that clue you in to what's most important to success in the position. Avoid asking the more generic "Tell me about yourself" question, which could elicit personal information about children, church affiliation and other off-limits topics.

2. "Can you work overtime? Weekends? Night shifts?" If this is an important component of the position, you should be asking the same question of all candidates: men and women, those under 40 and those over 40. Some interviewers draw conclusions about the willingness of a candidate (especially women with children) to work long hours or extra hours. Make sure you question all candidates about their willingness and ability to work nonstandard hours.

3. "This position requires that the employee carry animals up to 40 pounds several times a day – are you comfortable lifting and carrying an animal weighing up to 40 pounds several times in a work shift?" Don't assume that certain candidates aren't able (or willing) to do manual duties or work at certain jobs. Ask specific questions based on the person's ability to perform essential functions of the job. You can even test the applicant's ability to perform the task. Again, it's not good to make assumptions.

4. "Do you have any physical limitations that would keep you from performing the job's essential functions?" You're entitled to know, but first, you must clearly define a job's essential functions (see Job Descriptions). Second, you should ask this question of all applicants for this position.

You can also ask what type of accommodation applicants would require. But you can ask this only if the person has an obvious disability or the applicant volunteers that he or she has a disability. These rules are covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA - see Appendix).

Interview questions that focus on the following areas may have a discriminatory effect by eliminating minorities, females, older workers, and those with disabilities from the selection pool. In summary, these are the areas you should not inquire about:

- Race
- Religion
- Gender
- Sexual orientation

- Height and/or weight (unless there is a job-specific reason)
- Age
- Marital status
- Arrest records
- National origin
- Financial status (consumer credit reports must comply with the Fair Credit Reporting Act of 1970 and the Consumer Credit Reporting Reform Act of 1996).
- Military record (type of discharge)
- Physical or mental disability (unrelated to the job)

It is never a good idea to ask the following 25 questions:

1. Are you married? Divorced?

   Better: Have you ever been known by another name? (if you need to contact former employers or references)

2. If you're single, are you living with anyone?
3. How old are you?
4. Do you have children? If so, how many and how old are they?

   Better: Is there anything that prevents you from working these hours?

5. Do you own or rent your home?
6. What church do you attend?
7. Do you have any debts?
8. Do you belong to any social or political groups?

   Better: What professional or trade groups do you belong to that you consider relevant to your ability to perform this job?

9. What type of military discharge did you receive?
10. Do you suffer from an illness or disability?

    Better: Is there anything that prevents you from performing the essential functions of this job?

11. Have you ever had or been treated for any of these conditions or diseases?
12. Have you been hospitalized? What for?
13. Have you ever been treated by a psychiatrist or psychologist?
14. Have you had a major illness recently?
15. How many days of work did you miss last year because of illness?
16. Do you have any disabilities or impairments that might affect your performance in this job?
17. Are you taking any prescribed drugs?
18. Have you ever been treated for drug addiction or alcoholism?

19. Do you plan to get married?
20. Do you intend to start a family?
21. What are your daycare plans?
22. Are you comfortable supervising men?
23. What would you do if your husband were transferred?
24. Do you think you could perform the job as well as a man?
25. When did you graduate from high school?

And remember, if a candidate starts to reveal personal information that you're not allowed to ask, don't pursue the topic further. Steer the candidate back to job-related questions. It doesn't matter who brought the subject up - you must get the interview back on track right away since you are controlling the interview.

Types of Interviews – (Traditional, Structured and Behavioral based)

Traditional Interviews

Traditional interviews provide roughly 2% improvement over chance. That means that a traditional interview is only somewhat better than flipping a coin to pick a candidate for the job. Usually the interviewer starts off the interview by describing the job and what they are looking for in a candidate. Essentially, they are unwittingly prompting the candidate with the "right" answers to the interview questions. They are typically unstructured and interviewers are unprepared and creating the questions as they go. In a traditional interview, the manager is usually the one doing the majority of the talking. It's impossible to find out about the candidate when the interviewer is doing most of the talking! And, remember, the applicant is forming an impression of the clinic during the interview, so a poor interview process reflects poorly on the clinic.

Structured Interviews

One of the most common ways to improve the traditional interview is to develop a list of questions to ask every applicant and prepare an interview guide to use with all candidates. The questions should be focused on job performance and the assessment should be made on the basis of the notes taken during the interview. A structured interview fosters decisions made on job-related information after the interview is completed. (see Sample Interview Guide in Appendix).

Behavioral-Based Interviews

Behavioral-based interviewing is based on extensive research designed to study and improve the accuracy of selection decisions in the interviewing process. It is based on the following premises:

- The best predictor of future performance is past performance
- And, the more recent the past behavior, the greater its predictive power
- And, the more longstanding the behavior, the greater its predictive power

Behavioral interviewing is a planned process that allows the interviewer to "see" how a candidate has actually performed in a variety of situations in the past. It focuses on job-related behaviors and is an objective measure of the candidate's level of skill or aptitude on a variety of performance competencies important for job success. (see Sample Interview Performance Competencies in Appendix). Behavioral-based interviews ask the candidate to describe a situation that actually happened so it's harder for the candidate to fake. It also allows for a series of follow-up questions or probes that provide even more information with which to assess the candidate's level of ability. A well-constructed behavioral-based interview question should allow you to close your eyes and pretend like you are actually in the room observing the candidate in action – it should be detailed, descriptive and an objective review of what the situation was, what the candidate did and said, and the outcome.

An example of a behavioral-based interview question measuring teamwork for an Administrative Assistant position is:

> *Can you think of the last time you were asked to help out on a task that was not directly your responsibility?*
>
> *When did this happen?*
>
> *What was the task you were asked to do?*
>
> *What was your own situation with regard to workload at the time?*
>
> *How long would the task take to complete?*
>
> *Did you have a choice of whether to do it or not?*
>
> *Were you able to be of some assistance?*
>
> *How often did situations like this happen in the past year?*

The responses will be as different as the candidates; however, you will have better examples from your stronger candidates and weak examples from your less-qualified candidates. (see examples of behavior-based interview questions in Appendix).

Competency-Based Approach

Job competencies have long been used to hire employees and to link an employment strategy to the critical success factors of the company. Competencies are the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for your overall clinic success. For example, if teamwork, communication, and commitment to the mission are important to your clinic's success, then it makes sense to be hiring, evaluating and retaining employees based on their levels of particular competencies. In staffing, competencies are used in the interview and evaluation stages, allowing your clinic to get objective feedback about the candidate's skills, knowledge, and experience. More importantly, evaluations based on the important competencies help determine if the individual is a match for your clinic's culture. Because core competencies can also be integrated into all other aspects of employee management – training, performance measurement, rewards – employees have a solid foundation to measure their performance and success against.

Think about those core competencies that are critical to your culture, your mission and your overall success and ensure that they are built into your interview process and all other aspects of employee management.

Summary

In summary, it's a good idea to review the following checklist before beginning your interview process.

- Prepare! This is an important part of your Director duties – be sure to spend the necessary time in preparing for the interviews.
- Set a comfortable and distraction-free setting.
- Keep the interview conversational and remember: the interviewer should only do 20% of the talking and that is mainly to guide and control the interview – the candidate should be talking 80% of the time.
- Ask open-ended questions and continue with appropriate follow-up questions.
- Take good notes.
- Hold off on making a decision until the end of the interview – watch out for rater errors (see below for examples of common mistakes by interviewers).
- Get more feedback – think about others who could and should have input into the hiring decision. Take them to lunch and get a real feel for how they interact.
- Remember to sell the candidate on the position and the clinic! If you offer them the job, you want them to want it.
- Every time you hire, you are making a decision that will have a huge impact on you, your staff and your clinic – so take it seriously!

To avoid trouble in interviews, remember the following:

- Make sure the process revolves around job requirements.
- Avoid personal questions (or discussions) that aren't job related – get the interview back on track if the applicant brings up irrelevant, personal information.
- Follow up with all candidates as quickly as possible.
- Avoid giving overly specific reasons for not hiring a candidate - you can just state that there was a better-qualified applicant.

Most hiring mistakes fall into two categories: 1) hiring someone who should not have been hired, and 2) not hiring someone who should have been. People make these mistakes, often unintentionally, because they have a poor recruiting and hiring strategy - or none at all. That leaves selection standards unclear. Some common mistakes that interviewers make are:

- **Halo Effect** - People tend to react to first impressions and sometimes let one positive characteristic override all other aspects of a person's behavior. The effect is that the individual is "great". Most impressions are made during the first three minutes of the interview. If you withhold judgment until after the interview, an employee may turn out to be not as skilled or personable as you initially thought.
- **Horns Effect** - Unlike the previous example, this problem happens when someone is judged to be unqualified because of a negative attribute that may or may not be job-related. By remaining

objective, you might find that the candidate actually has the necessary skills and could end up being the best person for the job.

- **Cloning** - I'm perfect and the world needs more of me! Too many people want to hire somebody just like themselves to do a job that they can't or won't do, and then wonder why this arrangement didn't work out. They have an immediate positive reaction to those with the same personality and/or looks and don't realize that this similarity may not necessarily mean these candidates are the right candidate for the job.

- **Desperation** - When you need an employee, you usually need them yesterday. There can be a desperation to just get somebody in there. Many people overlook signs of trouble in their haste to get the position filled.

- **Inexperienced Interviewers** - The inability to ask the right questions or to hear what the candidate is really saying often leads to a misinterpretation of the discussion. Avoid the trap of hearing what you want to hear. Keep formal notes to accurately record what is said during interviews. Make sure your job requirements and performance expectations are clear. Be prepared for interviews to get what you need out of them.

- **Lack of Planning** - Failing to plan is planning to fail. When you fail to have a structured hiring process then you usually fly by the seat of your pants. This is not a good way to make a decision. There are no shortcuts in the hiring process.

Background Checks, Drug Testing and Reference Checking & Giving

Background Check Procedures

When hiring a new employee, it's impossible to be sure that you know everything about them and their past experiences. You can ask the questions; however, employees aren't always honest or forthcoming with the unattractive parts of their past. A background check can help an employer in many ways. A recent article by SHRM (Society of Human Resource Management) entitled Criminal Background Checks: A Checklist of the Pros and Cons listed the following reasons to conduct a background check:

- Reduce theft and embezzlement
- Limit legal exposure for negligent hiring and retention
- Increase applicant quality
- Check for potential discipline problems
- Verify application information
- Decrease insurance costs
- Discover drug or alcohol problems in applicant
- Decrease workplace violence
- Discourage applicants who have something to hide
- Limit uncertainty in the hiring process
- Enable the company to know who it is hiring

The National Association of Professional Background Screeners (NAPBS) reports that, "The need to hire the most qualified candidate, and the inherent risk in hiring the wrong candidate, has never been greater. Workplace crime, unethical business practices, and misleading résumés are on the rise. The costs of fraud, embezzlement, theft and violence are a multi-billion dollar drain on our economy, bleeding organizations both large and small. Furthermore, negative publicity associated with negligent hiring—especially as the result of a less than thorough background check—can devastate the very foundation of a trusted organization. Organizations owe it to themselves and to everyone with whom they come into contact to know everything they can about their employees and volunteers, and the most effective method to accomplish this is by conducting thorough background checks."

Pre-employment background checks can help you screen out applicants who may be unfit (or dangerous) for your workplace because of a criminal record. A background check also can confirm the accuracy of information that the candidate provided on the application. When employers request that a third party agency prepare a background report on applicants or employees, the request is governed by a federal statute known as the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA, see Appendix). The FCRA sets standards for employment screening and requires that a potential employee gives you their consent before you can conduct a background check. Also, it is important to ensure that you are following both state and federal laws concerning the kinds of information an employer uses to make employment decisions. If you do decide to incorporate background checks in your hiring process, use a reputable firm to provide the checks and forms for your use.

The FCRA establishes specific procedures to follow in the procurement and use of such background reports, known as "consumer reports" and "investigative consumer reports," for employment purposes. The risks to employers who fail to comply with the FCRA's requirements are significant and may result in statutory damages, costs, attorneys' fees, and, under certain circumstances, punitive damages. It is important to know and follow the proper procedures when obtaining and using background reports.

Policies and Procedures

1. Establish a Background Check Policy that will fulfill the needs of your clinic (see Sample Background Check Policies in Appendix).
    a. Background check all staff, including directors, managers, full-time employees, part-time employees, temps, contractors, and volunteers.
    b. Limit access to background check information and files to select staff.
    c. Determine the level of background check needed based on a position's risk to the company, clients, public, and fellow employees. For example, you may want to conduct different searches for office staff, those with access to narcotics and transport driver positions. The higher the risk of the position, the more it justifies an enhanced search. An example of a higher risk position is a finance position that handles the clinics checks, deposits and other finances, or a vet who has unrestricted access to narcotics and other drugs.
    d. Have your background check provider help you with the necessary employer documentation, applicant notifications, and applicant approvals.

> Note: The Background Check Authorization and Release must be a separate document from the application.

2. Ensure that the job application includes sections for the applicant to document all employment, education, certification, and other job requirements.
    a. Provide instructions to the applicant to completely fill out the application.
    b. Provide a place for the applicant to sign and certify the accuracy of all information on the application.

> Make sure the applicant signs and dates the application or consider it invalid!

    c. Provide a signature line or place for the applicant to initial to acknowledge the consequences if they provide false information.

Conducting the Background Check

An effective background check involves reviewing information from a number of different sources determined by the level of the position:

1. **Social Security Numbers** - Starting with a check of the applicant's social security number will show the names and addresses associated with that social security number. The report also may show if a social security number is valid, when it was issued, and where it was issued. A social security number check can provide information on the applicant's name and address history that can be used when running criminal record checks. Applicants (especially those with something to hide) often do not disclose all of the names they have used or give a complete address history. You need to know which states the applicant has resided in to check each state of residence. And, a social security number check will show whether an applicant has provided an invalid social security number or is using someone else's number.

   The information reported by a check on the applicant's social security number usually goes back three to ten years.

2. **State/County Criminal Records Check** - A state/county criminal records background check is a search of a specific state and/or county's court records. It is the most common type of search in an employment background check. It provides felony information, and it may also contain misdemeanor or other infraction information. Reports usually include the jurisdiction searched, the individual's personal identifiers as they appear in the case file, the file date, charges, disposition, disposition dates, and sentencing information.

   A county court's records are the primary source for county criminal records review. County courts oversee criminal cases that fall under the jurisdiction of the State Court system. When properly conducted, County criminal records provide you with information you need to be able to make an informed hiring decisions. You have a moral and legal obligation to provide a safe work environment for your other workers, clients and volunteers. Knowing whether a potential employee has been involved in criminal activity (such as drug or other substance abuse, dishonesty, theft, or dangerous and violent behaviors) allows you to determine if an applicant is appropriate for the job and work environment. This type of research provides an important element for the defense against negligent hiring claims.

   Various state and federal laws determine what information can be reported to an employer. Also, training is sometimes required to interpret the court language used, as it can be a reported directly as it appears on the court records.

3. **Employment Verification** - An employment verification report verifies previous employment dates, job titles, and salary or pay rates. This type of check will confirm the applicant's reason for leaving their previous position and their eligibility for rehire. This information can reveal red flags or other problem areas. An employment verification can also confirm the applicant's actual prior job experience and solicits past performance information from the prior employers.

   Research has shown that many applicants exaggerate and list fraudulent employment claims. This search can either be done through a background check company or through your own internal sources to conduct reference checks. If you do the reference checks yourself, see Reference Checking & Giving.

4. **Education Verification** - Education verifications can either be conducted through a background check company or, again, by internal staff who are trained in conducting reference checks. Many applicants overstate or fabricate their educational degrees and, especially for professional and management positions, the degree may be an important job requirement.

Criminal Background Checks Q&A

Who should we be running a criminal background check on? It is recommended that, at a minimum, a criminal background check (and reference check) should be run on all employees, board members, and volunteers.

Who in the clinic should be responsible for processing the background check information? It is recommended that the Director review the background information or that they appoint an individual who oversees the screening and review process. This employee must be discreet and able to handle confidential information.

Who is to be made aware of the information found on the background check? The clinic Director shall only share personal information contained in the employee application, background check or other information obtained through the screening process with others who need to know. There is an expectation of privacy by the screened candidate. FCRA requires that the applicant also have access to the information reported on their screening.

Where should these records be maintained and for how long? It is recommended that your clinic retain each application, background check information, and any other documents obtained in the individual's personnel file for seven years past the termination of the relationship or three years if not hired. Check state law to confirm the length of time you must keep your records.

What forms do employees/volunteers need to complete to allow us to run the criminal background check on them? Your clinic should have applicants sign a Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) form that allows your clinic to run checks. A copy of this form can be found in the Appendix.

Should a background check be run only after an offer is extended? Ideally, it's good practice to identify criminal backgrounds prior to bringing a new staff person on board. If you decide to run the background screening after an offer is made, include language in the offer letter that the offer is contingent upon satisfactory results of the screening. This way, if the background screening report is returned with unsatisfactory results, the offer letter is rescinded. In order to save on time and cost, it's recommended you screen only those candidates you're truly serious about hiring.

5. Based on your specific situation, other valuable checks may include:

   a. Credit Check – usually required for positions handling finances

   b. License Verification – for positions requiring driving on the job

   c. Motor Vehicle Report – for positions requiring driving on the job

d. Workers' Compensation History

Completing the Background Check Process

1. After reviewing the information, provide an adverse action notice to the applicant if necessary.

2. Ensure that the background reports are only viewed by employees who need to have access to the information. The reports should be kept in the employees employment file in a locked drawer.

Background Screening Summary

Before conducting a background screen on any applicants, a proper release form should be completed and signed by the applicant (see Appendix).

Outsourcing Your Background Checks

There are many companies out there who have focused their business on being able to assist you with your background checks. Your choice of a background screening partner will be influenced by the size of your clinic, how many screens you plan to do in a year, your policy on the types of screens you need to perform, and your budget.

Some things you want to consider before partnering with a background screening company are:

- Is the system easy to use? Most are online but someone at the clinic will have to enter the data. Is it easy to input the information and access and interpret the results?
- Do they customize the type of search that you need done? Will they allow you to design the background screening process based on your policy or do they only have "canned" reports available at one price?
- Do they provide a quick turnaround? Usually, when you're at the background screening stage, you are ready to hire when you have the results – you don't want to be waiting on your background screening company before you can hire the applicant.
- Will they assist you with sample forms, adverse action letters and other documentation?
- Do they provide any cost breaks to nonprofits?

Some possible companies that you can review include: www.EdgeInformation.com, www.selection.com (provides screens at cost or no-cost for nonprofits), and www.hireright.com.

Drug Testing

The clinic's philosophy and tolerance concerning alcohol and drugs sets the tone for its drug-free workplace policy and program. The most effective drug-free workplace programs send a clear message that drug and alcohol use will not be tolerated in the workplace along with encouraging employees to seek assistance if they are struggling with alcohol or drug problems.

Your clinic will need to think through the issues of drug and alcohol testing and determine what type of program, if any, will serve the needs of your clinic. The following information is culled from the Department of Labor's Drug Free-Workplace Advisor website and includes a comprehensive review of the rationale, types and processes for an effective drug-free workplace program.

Purpose of a Drug Testing Program

Drug testing works best when the program includes the following components: a clear, written policy that is shared with all employees, training for supervisors on the signs and symptoms of alcohol and drug abuse, and an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to provide help for employees who may have an alcohol or drug problem.

Effective drug-free workplace programs are customized to your clinic's needs, overall philosophy on tolerance, and ability to adhere to the policy. Some of the important factors to consider when implementing a drug testing program are:

- The rights of employees and employers
- The need to know and rights to privacy
- Detection and rehabilitation
- Respect for employees and the safety of all employees

Developing an effective program that strikes the right balance can be challenging. Your clinic is strongly encouraged to:

- Research what other clinics are doing, what resources they utilize, and what resources are available in your area
- Assess the current situation and determine any special needs (see this section of the DOL website for info on how to do this)
- Determine whether any specific state or Federal laws apply to a drug testing program (see this section of the DOL website for info on how to do this)

Creating a Drug-Free Workplace Policy

Your drug-free workplace policy will be the foundation of your drug-free workplace program. Your policy should be customized to meet your specific local needs; however, review the following for inclusion in your policy:

1. Why the policy is being implemented - a general statement regarding the Clinic's commitment to protecting the safety, health and well-being of its employees and clients and the reality that drug and alcohol abuse compromises this dedication.

2. Clear instruction of what type of behavior is not tolerated - at a minimum, this should include the following statement: "The use, possession, transfer or sale of illegal drugs by employees is prohibited."

3. Clear instruction of the consequences for violating the policy - it is important to state that the consequences for violating the policy include discipline up to and including termination and/or referral for assistance. Consequences should be consistent with any applicable state laws.

Communicating the Policy

If you expect employees to abide by your policies, you must communicate the policies to all employees. It is critical to your program's success that you first, communicate the policy and program to all employees, and second, follow your policy.

At a minimum, employees should receive a written copy of your drug-free workplace program. It is also a good idea to train employees on the drug and alcohol program and include the following topics:

1. Why do employers drug test?

Alcohol and drug abuse creates significant safety and health hazards and can result in decreased productivity and poor employee morale. It also can lead to additional costs in the form of healthcare claims, especially short-term disability claims.

2. How is drug testing conducted and how accurate is it?

Generally, most private employers have a fair amount of latitude in implementing drug testing as they see fit for their organization, unless they are subject to certain Federal regulations, such as the U.S. Department of Transportation's (DOT) drug-testing rules for employees in safety-sensitive positions.

While private employers are not required to follow these guidelines, doing so can help them stay on safe legal ground. Court decisions have supported following these guidelines, and as a result, many employers choose to follow them. The Mandatory Guidelines for Federal Workplace Drug Testing (also called SAMHSA's guidelines) include having a Medical Review Officer (MRO) evaluate tests. They also identify the five substances tested for in Federal drug testing programs and require the use of drug labs certified by SAMHSA.

The most common method of drug testing, urinalysis, can be done at the workplace (at a health unit, for example), a doctor's office or any other site selected by the employer. An employee or applicant provides a sample to be tested. Usually precautions are taken, such as putting blue dye in the toilet and turning off the water supply, to prevent adulteration or substitution of specimens so that collection can be completed in privacy without any direct visual observation by another person.

Under SAMHSA's guidelines, once a sample is provided, it is sent to a certified laboratory. The accuracy of drug tests done by certified laboratories is very high, but this certification applies only to the five substances tested for in Federal drug-testing programs and alcohol.

Below are certain procedures required by SAMHSA's guidelines to ensure accuracy and validity of the testing process:

- **Chain of Custody**: A chain-of-custody form is used to document the handling and storage of a sample from the time it is collected until the time it is disposed. It links an individual to his or her sample and is written proof of all that happens to the specimen while at the collection site and the laboratory.
- **Initial Screen:** The first analysis done on a sample is called an initial screen. This one test alone is not always accurate or reliable; there is a possibility of a false positive. Thus, in the event that the initial screen is positive, a second confirmatory test should be done.

- **Confirmation Test:** A second, confirmation test (by gas chromatography/mass spectrometry or GC/MS) is highly accurate and provides specificity to help rule out any false positives (mistakes) from the initial screen. For a test result to be reported as positive, the initial screen and confirmation test results must agree.
- **Split Sample:** A split sample is created when an initial urine sample is split into two. One sample is used for the initial screen and, if positive, the second sample is used for the confirmation test. If there is a positive result, the individual being tested may request the confirmation test be done at a different laboratory. DOT's alcohol and drug-testing regulations require all tests be performed using a "split sample" collection process.

In the event that the initial screen and confirmation test are both positive, a Medical Review Officer (or MRO - a licensed medical doctor who has special training in the area of substance abuse) then reviews the results, makes sure the chain-of-custody procedures were followed, and contacts the individual to make sure there are no medical or other reasons for the result. It is only at this point that the MRO may report a positive test result to the employer. Certain medications can sometimes cause a positive result. If this is the case, and a doctor prescribed the medicine and the employee used it in the proper amount, the test is reported as negative.

3. Who is allowed access to the results of a drug test?

The result of a drug test may be considered personal health information. Consequently, there may be restrictions on how and whether such information (as well as other information related to an employee's history of alcohol or drug use) can be shared with others. This is why employees who undergo a drug test generally must sign a release (usually at the time of the test) in order for their employer to receive the results.

4. When are drug tests conducted?

Your policy should list the times that employees may expect to be drug tested. The following are common times that employers will drug/alcohol test employees or applicants:

- **Pre-Employment Testing:** Conducted to prevent hiring individuals who illegally use drugs. It typically takes place after a conditional offer of employment has been made. Applicants agree to be tested as a condition of employment and are not hired if they fail to produce a negative test.
- **Reasonable Suspicion:** Similar to, and sometimes referred to, as "probable-cause" or "for-cause" testing and is conducted when supervisors document observable signs and symptoms that lead them to suspect drug use or a drug-free workplace policy violation. It is extremely important to have clear, consistent definitions of what behavior justifies drug and alcohol testing and any suspicion should be corroborated by another supervisor or manager. Since this type of testing is at the discretion of management, it requires careful, comprehensive supervisor training. In addition, it is advised that employees who are suspected of drug use or a policy violation not return to work while awaiting the results of reasonable suspicion testing.
- **Post-Accident:** Since property damage or personal injury may result from accidents, testing following an accident can help determine whether drugs and/or alcohol were a factor. It is important to establish objective criteria that will trigger a post-accident test and how and by

whom they will be determined and documented. Examples of criteria used by employers include: fatalities; injuries that require anyone to be removed from the scene for medical care; damage to vehicles or property above a specified monetary amount; and citations issued by the police. Although the results of a post-accident test determine drug use, a positive test result in and of itself cannot prove that drug use caused an accident. When post-accident testing is conducted, it is a good idea for employers not to allow employees involved in any accident to return to work prior to or following the testing. Employers also need to have guidelines to specify how soon following an accident testing must occur so results are relevant. Substances remain in a person's system for various amounts of time, and it is usually recommended that post-accident testing be done within 12 hours. Some employers expand the test trigger to incidents even if an accident or injury was averted and hence use term "post-incident."

- **Random:** Random testing is performed on an unannounced, unpredictable basis on employees whose identifying information (e.g., social security number or employee number) has been placed in a testing pool from which a scientifically arbitrary selection is made. This selection is usually computer generated to ensure that it is indeed random and that each person of the workforce population has an equal chance of being selected for testing, regardless of whether that person was recently tested or not. Because this type of testing has no advance notice, it serves as a deterrent.

- **Periodic:** Periodic testing is usually scheduled in advance and uniformly administered. Some employers use it on an annual basis, especially if physicals are required for the job. Such tests generally are more accepted by employees than unannounced tests, but employees can prepare for them by stopping their drug use several days beforehand.

- **Return-to-Duty:** Return-to-duty testing involves a one-time, announced test when an employee who has tested positive has completed the required treatment for substance abuse and is ready to return to the workplace. Some employers also use this type of testing for any employee who has been absent for an extended period of time.

- **Other:** Other types of tests can include:

  - Follow-up testing conducted on a periodic basis after an employee returns to the workplace upon completing rehabilitation for a drug or alcohol problem
  - Blanket testing: an unannounced test where everyone at a worksite is tested
  - Voluntary
  - Probationary
  - Pre-promotion (into a position requiring screening)
  - Return-after-illness testing

5. What specimen will be tested as part of the drug testing?

There are a number of different bodily specimens that can be chemically tested to detect evidence of recent drug use. Although some state laws dictate which types of tests can be used, a number of options are technologically feasible. Urine is the most commonly used specimen for illicit drugs.

Results of a urine test show the presence or absence of drug metabolites in a person's urine. Metabolites are drug residues that remain in the body for some time after the effects of a drug have worn off. It is important to note that a positive urine test does not necessarily mean a person was under the influence of drugs at the time of the test. Rather, it detects and measures use of a particular drug within the previous few days and has become the de facto evidence of current use. Because alcohol passes rapidly through the system, urine tests must be conducted very quickly after alcohol consumption in order to ensure any degree of accuracy. For this reason, urine tests are generally not helpful in detecting alcohol use as opposed to illicit and prescription drug use, which is more easily traced in urine.

6. What drugs does the drug testing program detect?

Testing conducted according to SAMHSA's guidelines checks for five illicit drugs plus, in some cases, alcohol (ethanol, ethyl alcohol, booze). These five illicit drugs are:

- Amphetamines (meth, speed, crank, ecstasy)
- THC (cannabinoids, marijuana, hash)
- Cocaine (coke, crack)
- Opiates (heroin, opium, codeine, morphine)
- Phencyclidine (PCP, angel dust)

However, most private employers are not limited in the number of substances they can test for and may include drugs that individuals legitimately and/or therapeutically take based on a physician's prescription. Although most private employers can test for any combination of drugs, there are commonly selected "panels."

The typical 8-Panel Test includes the above-mentioned substances plus:

- Barbiturates (phenobarbital, butalbital, secobarbital, downers)
- Benzodiazepines (tranquilizers like Valium, Librium, Xanax)
- Methaqualone (Quaaludes)

The typical 10-Panel Test includes the 8-Panel Test plus:

- Methadone (often used to treat heroin addiction)
- Propoxyphene (Darvon compounds)

Testing can also be done for:

- Hallucinogens (LSD, mushrooms, mescaline, peyote)
- Inhalants (paint, glue, hairspray)
- Anabolic steroids (synthesized, muscle-building hormones)
- Hydrocodone (prescription medication known as Lortab, Vicodin, Oxycodone)
- MDMA (commonly known as Ecstasy)

7. Is drug testing legal?

In most cases it is legal for employers to test employees for drugs. No federal laws prohibit the practice. However, there are several states that restrict or question an employer's ability to randomly drug test employees who are not in safety-sensitive positions. Thus, it is very important that employers familiarize themselves with the various state laws that may apply to their organization before implementing a drug testing program.

8. How does one start a drug testing program?

Drug testing is only one component of a comprehensive drug-free workplace program, which also includes a written policy that clearly outlines employer expectations regarding drug use; training for supervisors on the signs and symptoms of drug use and their role in enforcing the policy; education for employees about the dangers of drug use; and an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to provide counseling and referral to employees struggling with drug problems. DOL's online Drug-Free Workplace Advisor helps employers develop customized drug-free workplace policies (that may or may not include drug testing) by reviewing the different components of a comprehensive policy and then generating a written policy statement based on the user's responses to pre-set questions and statements (your clinic's name and logo can be incorporated and further modifications to the statement made if desired). If an organization already has a drug-free workplace policy in place, this tool can be used to ensure it addresses all necessary issues. Because it is important to understand and incorporate the various state and federal regulations that may apply, it is also recommended that legal consultation be sought before commencing a drug testing program.

A comprehensive drug-free workplace program contributes to a workplace free of the health, safety and productivity hazards caused by employees' abuse of alcohol or drugs. By educating employees about the dangers of alcohol and drug abuse and encouraging individuals with related problems to seek help, employers can protect their businesses from such dangers, retain valuable employees and help play a part in making communities safer and healthier.

Other Drug-Testing Resources

In addition, the Department of Labor (DOL) has a very comprehensive website with resources that are helpful to any organization implementing workplace drug testing (see Working Partners). The Drug and Alcohol Testing Industry Association website can also be helpful.

Reference Checking & Giving

One of the most valuable tools for gathering information on the past performance of applicants is reference checking. Past performance is one of the strongest predictors of future performance, and reference checks can provide a good deal of information on the candidate's recent past performance. If your clinic is going to conduct reference checks, they should be made on all new employees of all types: regular full-time or part-time, temporary, contractors and interns.

Reference checks serve as an important part of the selection process. An investment in reference checking can reduce costs and increase productivity by helping to ensure successful hires, screening for a good clinic fit, and avoiding hiring mistakes. It can also serve as a means of preventing violence in the workplace, preventing discrimination or harassment, and promoting a safe work environment for current and future employees. Conducting a thorough reference check can avoid charges of "negligent hiring."

Most states have legislation that protects an employer who in good faith provides information about the job performance, professional conduct, or evaluation of a former or current employee to a prospective employer; however, it's becoming more and more difficult to get detailed reference information from prior employers. Many are now just giving "name, rank and serial number" on prior employees and refuse to address performance issues. But, whenever feasible, it's helpful to collect as much information as possible so that you can make a good selection decision.

Generally, as long as employers are requesting appropriate information and are giving true and correct information, both positive and negative, they are protected by immunity laws.

To collect appropriate information and minimize liability:

- The reference checking process should be designated so that only certain staff trained in conducting reference checks are actually conducting them
- Tailor the reference or background check to the job

Remember: Questions to avoid include those regarding marital status, religion, age, race, health-related issues, child care, transportation, worker compensation claims, and other non-job related questions.

- Have applicants sign a written release of information for employment purposes
- Check as many employment and personal references as possible before making an offer of employment
- Verify academic degrees, professional certifications or licenses, etc.
- Be consistent, ask the same questions of each reference
- Always ask if the employee is eligible for rehire
- Maintain documentation for each reference, including those that produce no information

How to Conduct a Reference Check

Reference checks should be conducted in compliance with all federal and state laws and regulations including the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Acts (ADAAA), Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, the Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures, and the Fair Credit Reporting Act, as applicable.

The ADAAA prohibits asking non-job related information from previous employers or other sources. If the job does not entail supervision, do not ask about supervisory skills. However, questions can and should be designed to uncover behavior and performance issues such as, "Has the person ever been disciplined or investigated for serious misconduct?" If the applicant indicates that the current supervisor should not be contacted, ask about contacting the current supervisor contingent on a job offer. If the applicant still declines, they should be told that the lack of the current supervisor's reference may affect the hiring decision.

Reference checks may be completed in person, or by telephone, mail, internet or fax; however, a personal phone call will probably yield the most information. The best references normally come from former supervisors; other good sources can include coworkers, clients, HR departments, executives, and listed references. Review the duties of the vacant position and review the application materials. Make a list of facts or qualifications to verify and a list of questions to ask.

Some topics that might be important for your clinic include:

- Interpersonal skills - how well does the applicant get along with and relate to other people?
- Knowledge, experience and skills - how well does the applicant know the work and perform on the job? Assess technical/functional ability and attitude on the job.
- Dependability and reliability - is the person trustworthy, reliable and dependable?

When conducting reference checks, be friendly and introduce yourself. Let the person know that you have written consent for the reference check or that the applicant listed that person as a reference. Briefly outline the job responsibilities and start with basic verification questions. Then you can transition into more specific performance-based questions. Be sure to ask follow up or clarification questions if something isn't clear. Listen to the responses: is there hesitation or vagueness? Ask the reference at the end of the conversation if they can think of or recommend anyone else with whom you should speak. If information is not forthcoming you might ask questions such as, "How would you rate this employee on a scale of 1 to 10?"

Evaluating the Reference Information

- Don't accept all the information at face value; look at the context in which it was given. Personality conflicts and different work cultures may unfairly influence responses.
- It is best to use information from a combination of different methods to make an overall assessment (e.g., application materials, interviews, and reference checks).
- If you are in doubt about a candidate's qualifications, be sure to check additional references.

Keeping the Reference Information

All information obtained from the reference check process should only be used as part of the selection process and should be kept confidential with the applicant's other selection information.

Giving References

Define who in your clinic is authorized to give references and be sure that all supervisors know to direct reference questions to that individual. Before giving out a reference, it is a good idea to have a written consent from the employee on file. Most employers will fax or email a copy of a written release form if asked. Or, as part of your resignation process, your clinic could ask for and maintain a signed reference release form to be placed in the employee's file if they agree.

Most employers have resorted to just verifying basic information about their former employees in order to avoid any issues. The following information is basic information about a prior employee and is usually the minimum requested in a reference check:

- Employee's job title
- Dates of employment
- Rate of pay (starting and ending)

- Position duties and responsibilities
- Eligible for rehire?

While it feels like it is "playing it safe" to avoid providing any references about former employees, employers who do give truthful information about good former employees make it easier for them to advance in their careers, while truthful information regarding poor performers prevents them from obtaining jobs that may not be a good match.   However, most states have "black-listing" laws which state that you cannot willfully prevent someone from obtaining a job. Just because they didn't work out at your clinic, doesn't mean that a completely different work environment might not be a good fit. When giving job references, stick to the facts - do not share opinions or speculations.

Only truthful, job-related information based on actual documentation such as performance reviews, job descriptions, etc. should be given. (See Sample Reference Check Forms in Appendix). These are the types of questions you may want to use when requesting a reference or that other employers might ask you in a reference check.

Crafting Offer Letters

After you have made a decision on the candidate that you wish to hire for a specific position, you will most likely make a verbal offer to the candidate and then follow up with a written offer letter. When the candidate signs and returns the offer letter, it typically confirms that the candidate has accepted your position and its terms.

However, there are certain things that you need to think about before writing a letter and sending it off. There are things that you definitely want to include in the offer letter. There are also things that you want to be mindful of so that the offer letter isn't construed as an employment contract.

At Will Employment

The most important qualification that your offer letter should contain is a statement that the employment is "at will." You should avoid language that refers to the employment for a definite period of time or makes promises about future earnings or promotions. Otherwise, if things don't work out with the employee, they may file suit based on the language in the offer letter that implies an employment commitment between you and them. Some industries who have had difficulty recruiting and retaining certain specialized professional and technical employees have utilized employment contracts to guarantee employment; however, you probably do not want to imply guaranteed employment for most of your clinic positions.

Employment Contracts

You need to be aware of what a typical employment contract includes so that you don't inadvertently include these in your offer letters:

- Naming the specific parties involved in the contract or agreement (employer and employee)
- Duration of the job
- Job duties and requirements
- The level of compensation and benefits
- Conditions of employment
- Grounds for termination or resignation
- Non-compete agreements, to include non-solicitation of current employees
- Intellectual property components

A good idea is for you to create a generic offer letter with a standard format that you can use for any position being filled. The standard form would allow for the insertion of details specific to the job such as: the position title, the FLSA exemption status, start date, full- or part-time status and rates of pay. However, it is always a good idea to have someone review your template before you begin using it (see Sample Offer Letters in Appendix).

Step 1: Opening Statements and Basic Information

Begin with a welcome sentence that includes the position, start date, orientation date, full- or part-time status and applicable shift. Avoid using phrases that imply an indefinite future of employment, such as "job security," "we're a family company" or "in the future."

Step 2: Write Job-specific Information

Provide details on the salary and pay periods and the supervisor/manager to whom they will report, as well as the performance development/evaluation periods depending on whether the employee remains employed. Avoid written or oral statements of annual salary amounts; provide salary amounts in hourly, weekly or monthly salary terms.

Step 3: Benefits Information

Add another sentence or paragraph regarding the applicable benefits and eligibility for health care insurance, 401(k), life insurance, educational assistance, flexible spending accounts, short- and long-term disability, and accidental death and dismemberment coverage.

Step 4: Paid Leave Information

The amount of leave that they are entitled to should be described in the next sentence, which would include holidays, paid time off, and vacation, sick or personal time.

Step 5: Terms of Employment

Another paragraph should include the conditions of employment. This section would cover items such as successful completion of drug testing and background checks, signing of confidentiality agreements, compliance with immigration law and completion of an I-9. The conditions should never include statements about job security, promises of future employment or contractual agreements.

Step 6: At Will Employment

A statement that the employment relationship is "at will" needs to be added at this point. It allows you the right to terminate the employee at any time, with or without cause, and gives the employee the same right to resign from the position. A contract binds both the employer and the employee; an "at will" statement may alleviate that commitment. However, if you made any statements during the interview process, either orally or in the offer letter, that imply an employment agreement, then you may have an obligation to uphold it as a contract.

Step 7: Closing

Add information regarding a point of contact for questions or concerns. Include some sentiments that express the company's excitement in bringing the employee on board. Also, write a few words on the company culture. Finally, add a line for the employee's signature and date.

Step 8: Final Review

As with any document that you present to your employees, it is imperative that your offer letter be carefully crafted and reviewed to ensure that it is not a contract.

Real Life Examples of Offer Letter Issues

Scenario 1: An employer recruited for an open position, and after an extensive interview process, decided on a suitable candidate. The employer verbally offered the position to the candidate and followed up with an offer letter, which stated the company was financially sound and that the candidate "would have job security with them even during these tough economic times." The candidate accepted the position and signed the offer letter. About two months after the hire, the employee was told that the company would need to lay him off as part of a reduction in force. The employee immediately sought legal guidance, as the offer letter stated that there would be job security and did not include an "at will" statement. Although the suit was a financial burden to the company, it taught them a lesson in how to prepare an offer letter using appropriate language that does not constitute an implied contract.

Scenario 2: An offer letter was drafted after a candidate accepted an oral offer of employment. The letter confirmed an annual salary amount that was agreeable to the candidate, and it was signed. Six months into the job, the employer felt the employee was not a good fit and decided to terminate the employee. It was an at will employer - however, there was no statement of such in the offer letter, and the annual salary quoted in the letter implied that the employment was guaranteed for a year; therefore, the employee could not be terminated due to the implied duration of employment. This employer no longer adds annual salary amounts to offer letters; instead, they quote it on an hourly, weekly or monthly basis.

Orientation

New employees usually arrive for the first day of work full of enthusiasm and excitement about their new position at your clinic. They are starting their employment relationship with you eager to be accepted, ready to learn a lot and with a certain level of expectations. The employee's first day is like a first impression when meeting someone. Depending on how the orientation process is handled, the excitement may continue to grow, or could lead to disappointment and unmet expectations. In fact, recent turnover surveys show that lack of assimilation to the company and inadequate training are the leading reasons employees may leave within the first year.

You can set the stage for an employee's initial experience with your organization even before he or she walks through the door on the first day of work. Consider some of the basic types of information that can be very important to your new employees. Things like:

- What should I wear?
- Where should I park?
- Where should I report?
- Who should I ask for?

New employees are asking these questions even before they've walked into your clinic! All new employees will want to feel that they belong. Be sure to have a place for the employee to put their personal belongings, a place to sit and the initial tools and supplies that the employee will need to do his or her job. Something as simple as having a name tag or nameplate in place can send a very positive message to a new employee and make him or her feel welcome.

The orientation process is the new employee's first training program with your clinic. It doesn't have to be difficult or take up a lot of time but, like the interview process, it does require advance thought and planning. A good orientation process will help you as the clinic Director to ensure that all new employees:

- Feel welcomed
- Understand their individual role and responsibilities
- Receive the same information to answer basic questions about working at the clinic

A good orientation process ultimately translates to:

- More connected, loyal and satisfied employees
- Employees who understand how to do their job, therefore making fewer mistakes
- Better service for your clients and customer
- The ability for new employees to start being productive right away
- New employees who know where to go to get questions answered, thereby increasing efficiency
- Finally, less turnover in the first year

Without a structured orientation process, your new employees are forced to learn on their own. They may not be getting the right information from the right person and this can be time consuming, inefficient and even detrimental to your operations. The goal is to make sure that every employee receives important information from a consistent source.

Depending on your needs, the orientation can be done one-on-one in an informal setting or more formally in a group session. The ultimate goal of the orientation is to ensure that all new employees feel welcome, understand who and what they are working for and to encourage them to remain enthusiastic and excited about their job. When orientation is done well, the outcome is a successful and satisfied new employee.

Your new employee orientation process should begin with information and activities that all new employees should participate in, and continue with more specialized training depending on the employee's level in the company and their position. A rough outline can be found below. The New Employee Orientation Checklist can be customized to fit your particular clinic needs; however, at a minimum, all new employees should receive the basic information in the New Employee Orientation Checklist.

Your new employees will probably want to begin working as soon as possible. They want to quickly become involved and feel some sense of contribution. The first big question new employees have is, "What, exactly, will I be doing here?" That question encompasses a variety of issues, such as:

- Who will I be working with?
- Who are the people I need to get to know in the department and in other departments?
- What kind of work will I be doing?
- Where will my assignments be coming from?
- How will my work be judged?
- How does it fit in with what the department does and with the organization's goals?

These questions indicate that a more customized orientation program will go a long way towards answering your new employee's needs. Many companies assign an experienced employee as a mentor for new hires. The choice of a mentor should be based on the qualifications of the experienced employee and their overall work performance. You should only have your best employees mentoring new hires – you want the new employee to emulate good performers! (see Sample Orientation Programs in Appendix)

New Employee Orientation Checklist

General

- ☐ Clinic history, mission, vision and values
- ☐ Introduction to all employees and a tour of the facility
- ☐ A review of the clinic organization structure and lines of authority
- ☐ Special emphasis on their work area layout including: restrooms, break area, and employee parking
- ☐ Information on telephone usage, copiers, computer passwords, building security and other equipment/facility needs

- [ ] Who to go to with problems, questions or other issues as they arise

Benefits and Clinic Policies

- [ ] Information about all benefits: (including eligibility and enrollment)
- [ ] Medical (health, dental, vision, etc.)
- [ ] Retirement plan information
- [ ] Review of and sign off on receiving: Employee Handbook/Clinic Policies

Documentation and Payroll

- [ ] Employment application
- [ ] New hire paperwork
- [ ] W-4 form
- [ ] I-9 form
- [ ] Recording hours worked for payroll/payroll details (i.e. pay dates, picking up paychecks, etc.)
- [ ] Direct deposit form

Personal

- [ ] Facility tour
- [ ] Meet managers and co-workers

Other

- [ ] Training programs needed upon hire (i.e. Bloodborne Pathogen; Harassment Prevention training)
- [ ] Work schedule, breaks and meal breaks
- [ ] How to operate and answer phones
- [ ] Who to call in the event of an emergency or absence from work
- [ ] Advised of whom to notify or turn to if problems or questions arise
- [ ] Safety procedures, location of safety equipment, who to notify about unsafe conditions
- [ ] Advised of "Right to Know" regarding use of hazardous chemicals (including Material Safety Data Sheets)
- [ ] Advised of location of mandated employment posters
- [ ] How to report accidents, incidents or injuries

Onboarding - Bringing New Employees "On-Board"

While orientation programs are usually thought of in terms of the employee's first day or first few weeks, onboarding is a more comprehensive process of not just welcoming a new employee but assimilating them into your company over a longer period of time – sometimes six months to a year or longer! It's more of a philosophy and way of life for your clinic and affects everything you do with your staff.

Onboarding is the process of acquiring, accommodating, assimilating and accelerating new employees and generally includes the following steps:

- ✓ Acquire: Identify, recruit, select and hire the right employees
- ✓ Accommodate: Give new employees the tools they need to do work
- ✓ Assimilate: Help them join with others so they can do work together
- ✓ Accelerate: Help them (and their team) be more productive

Effective employee onboarding has a positive domino effect: it ensures that new hires feel welcome and prepared in their new positions, in turn giving them the confidence and resources to make an impact within the organization, and ultimately allowing the company to continue carrying out its mission

Effective onboarding of new employees is one of the most important contributions you can make to the long-term success of your clinic. Onboarding is very different from orientation because it has more emphasis on a long-term development process rather than a one-day program to provide needed information to new hires (although there is a lot of overlap between effective orientation and onboarding). Onboarding done right increases new employee productivity, accelerates results, and significantly improves overall retention, yet few companies are investing the time and energy to do onboarding well.

Start your Onboarding process before you recruit candidates

Articulate your onboarding plan.
Start by designing a plan that builds on your mission, vision and clinic values. Communicate your onboarding plan to your managers and get their feedback. What is it about your employees that is special? What is it about your clinic mission that is exciting? What kinds of employees are you looking for? Do they align with your clinic mission, vision and values?

Find potential candidates who align with your onboarding strategy.
Create recruiting channels that target the candidates you want to reach: cast a wide net to reach candidates that align with your mission, vision and values and have the knowledge, experience, skills and other characteristics necessary for success.

Evaluate candidates against the onboarding strategy while providing a good impression of the clinic and the job.
Everything communicates. Pay attention to what candidates will hear, see and believe. Candidates usually focus on getting an offer and then they consider whether or not to accept the position. So, if you haven't

done a good job selling the clinic up to that point in time, it may be too late. Complete the interviewing process with formal post-interview de-briefs, additional information gathering, and post-interview follow-ups with candidates to learn even more.

Make the right offer. Close the right sale - the right way.
You know how great it is to work at your clinic. You know the value you get by living the spay/neuter mission, but remember that a potential new employee may need to be convinced. Prepare the job offer as just one part of a strategic sale to the applicant. The way you handle the offer and support your candidate's efforts to make a good decision will impact the way he or she feels about you and your clinic. Remember, you only want candidates to accept your position if they are going to be satisfied with the job. It has to be the right job for them. You want them to self-select out of the process if it's not.

Involve the new employee in creating a personal onboarding plan with you.
Work with your new hire to develop a mutually beneficial onboarding process. This is an opportunity to demonstrate how much you value your new employee and how important they are to the overall success of the clinic. Work together to think through the job, their role in the clinic's success, and what they need to be successful over the first year. Create and document a 100-day action plan with details on who will do what next.

Manage the announcement to set your new employee up for success.
How you make the announcement is one of the most important ways you influence how welcome, valued and valuable your new employee feels. Think through and implement these steps:

- Community?
- Board members?
- Other employees?
- How exciting is the wording of the official announcement?

Do what it takes to make your new employee able and ready to do real work on their first day.

Think through the effective orientation process for more details on what the new employee will need to feel welcomed and assimilate on their first day. Pay attention to the impact your clinic makes on the new employee. Pay attention to the impact your new employee makes on the organization. Design the first day experience as you would for a client experience. Don't leave first impressions to chance, because while people don't always remember what others did or said, they always remember how they felt.

Speed development of important working relationships.
Assimilating a new employee into your clinic is a big deal. Doing it well makes things so much easier for all involved and avoids relationship problems from the start. Set up a chance for your new employee to meet and talk with members of his or her formal and informal work teams. Check in periodically with the new employee and the others in the work team to see how it is going. If there are issues, you want to know about them early, so you can help your new employee adjust.

There is a right way and a wrong way to bring new employees into your clinic. Effective onboarding increases your chances to get it right! It also decreases the time it takes for a new hire to reach expected productivity levels on the job. During these difficult economic times, it is even more important that you ensure your new employees are able to succeed and thrive on the job. There are some common mistakes that many companies make when developing an effective onboarding process.

1. Treating onboarding like orientation. Unlike orientation programs, onboarding is not a one-time event but a long-term process occurring over time. A good onboarding process can take up to a year. After all, you can't possibly expect an employee to absorb everything he or she needs to know in the first few days.

2. Starting the process too late in the game. Onboarding new hires actually begins during the interview process. During the interview process, the candidate is obtaining as much information about you and the clinic as you are obtaining from them. They begin to develop expectations about the culture of the company and about the professionalism of management, the communication styles of managers and employees, and the quality of the overall operations.

3. The onboarding process is never evaluated. Onboarding programs should be reviewed and evaluated like any other training or management process. You need to figure out a way to measure the success of your onboarding program and find ways to enhance it – otherwise, how do you know if it's working? Surveys can be useful to gauge the benefits of an onboarding process.

4. Managers don't have time to participate. One of the main reasons employees either leave or thrive in an organization is a direct result of their relationship with their manager. Research shows that 56% of Americans say their relationship with their boss has a direct impact on their work-life happiness. Taking the time to greet new employees in person and show them the ropes makes a critical first impression and is not something that can be delegated.