

## **“Hiring for Keeps” - The A,B,C’s of Staffing**

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*The mediocre mentor tells.  
The good mentor explains.  
The superior mentor demonstrates.  
The great mentor inspires.  
Be an inspiring mentor...  
Live your vision with passion, everyday*

Many technicians and practice managers have experienced that familiar hollow feeling that borders on panic when multiple positions are open at the hospital, the candidate pool is shallow and the well seems to have dried up for new recruits and good long term employees. Spirits plummet in the hospital - what are we going to do now?

Invariably, this seems to happen on or about the middle of May as heartworm season kicks into full swing and the summer holiday season looms. Oh, and there is bound to be a rash of maternity leaves to add into the foray just for fun. As valued members of any veterinary health care team many technicians find themselves involved with this revolving door process that seems to move staff into and out of their workplace.

What we DO know, is how this all affects us. It’s a lot of extra work, extra hours, extra shifts - it puts a wrench in our works, it doesn’t build the teams morale and it certainly doesn’t make clients happy. What we DON’T know as technicians is how to fix it.....OR do we?????

So what’s the solution? Put our heads in the sand and hope that this too will pass..... No. The solution is to get involved. Hire well, and train to retain. Technicians are some of the best teachers out there. Decrease your employee turn-over now by getting involved.

As technicians, where do we fit in? The answer is simple -- everywhere. In a team environment we are involved in every aspect.

- A) the interview and selection process,
- B) the orientation to the hospital,
- C) the training and the mentoring process for skills development.

We are an integral part of “the buddy system”.

You're good at your job, and you've been there a long time. Now help pass on the flame..... Give freely of that knowledge and experience and feel the pride in mentoring someone new to the team. Your team.

Let's start with the basics:

### The Interview and Selection process

## Acquiring applicants

It's important to know exactly what the clinics needs are before posting any notices for positions. Consider the table of questions below to help get you prepared.

Pre-qualifying for Job Postings:

What is the position title?	How many years experience are needed?
What skills or qualification are needed?	Is this a technical role or client service role?
Existing position or newly created role?	Can we fill this role from within?
Is it full or part time?	How will we advertise this position?
What is the pay scale?	Where will we advertise this position?
What is the shift?	When will we place the posting?
What is the schedule like?	When do we need this person in place by?
Who does the person report to?	What is the budget for hiring?

Once these basic questions have been considered and answered, it often becomes easier to compose a job posting and prepare interview questions.

## Be proactive!

Technicians are often the most appropriate people to determine what is really needed when the team is expanding or filling a position. One issue techs do understand is timing. Clinics must learn to forecast better and not wait until the last minute to begin looking for candidates. Always keep a net out fishing for potential team members.

All too often, hospitals find themselves in situations where they are under staffed and not delivering the caliber of service and care they have come to expect. This reflects in client satisfaction surveys with increased wait times and lack of attention to details. Often clients will not return and may tell friends they or their pet was treated poorly. Many times this is a direct result of being short staffed.

After composing the job profile, what's next? First, look within. As technicians, many times we can clearly see someone within the organization looking to move up or over to a different responsibility or shift within the clinic. Many hospitals would never dream of moving someone from the back out to the front or vice versa.

If you have more than one location, consider having a staff member do shifts in more than one location or switching clinics entirely. Sometimes a simple restructuring of the schedule can cover the hours comfortably and save the clinic money. Be sure to present these kinds of alternatives in case the manager or veterinarians hasn't spotted this opportunity. Gain a consensus within the team as to whether or not you need to post the position outside the clinic. Everyone loves a team member with solutions!

Many clinics will begin by placing an ad with their local paper to get things rolling. This will often bring in a significant number of resumés for people who would like to work with animals, however they may not have the experience or technical skills you require. This can also be quite costly.

Bear this goal in mind:

***Keep costs down, caliber and skills of the applicant pool up, and fill positions swiftly with no gaps in scheduling.***

To maximize efficiency, start with industry web sites, journals, conferences, tradeshow, and newsletters. Talk about the position or post it at local chapter meetings. Use your tech network - another clinic may be scaling back just when you need someone new!

\*Hint - create an email group in Outlook that is formatted to include local, provincial and national associations as well as colleges - that way with the click of a mouse the job posting is already placed.

**C**onsider your options:

Job sites like Monster.ca, or Workopolis can be of use, but know your budget before getting started. Additionally, things like billboards that are parked out front of the clinic, or sandwich boards posted in clinics can be helpful. Don't forget your clinics own hospital web page -ensure that the job is posted there first with a quick link to email a resumé in!

No time for all this? Still not getting the caliber of resumés needed? Consider leaving it to the pros. A consultant or employment agency will do all the preliminary work for one set fee. All costs and time incurred are theirs. They place the ads, they pre-qualify the applicants and screen them. They do the preliminary interviews. Clinics are presented with several qualified applicants to choose from in a final interview session. Many even guarantee a replacement if the staff member you accept doesn't work out.

**D**etermine what's working and what's not.

If the process you have isn't working - something needs to change! Turn the process you are currently using on its head and find out why it isn't working? Is the clinic interviewing team members to meet their mission and vision statement? Do the applicants have the same core values as the team? In the long run, unless you do a lot of interviewing and have some real skill in this area, outsourcing may prove to be a viable and more effective option for your hospital. As an added bonus, team members going through this process will learn from the consultant or agency how to implement a successful plan themselves.

## Elimination Process

It is important to maintain consistency at all times to give each applicant fair treatment.

The chart below is designed to help set up an effective interviewing process.

What is your selection criterion?	Will teammates be included in the sessions?
How are you sorting resumés and covering letters?	Will there be phone interviews for preliminary screening?
How will the clinic deal with candidates that are not selected?	Will there be reference checks?
What types of interviewing will be done?	Will supervisors be included in the interview process?
By Whom?	Are pets taken into the interview?
Is there a standard bank of questions to use?	Have you thought of aptitude testing or personality profiling?

## Orientation

All too often we hire a new staff member and then throw them to the wolves. In this case, the wolves are fellow staff members and our clients. Both are incredibly valuable and easily upset.

We want to set this new staff member up for success, not for failure. If we worked the plan and spent the time to hire well, we do not want to lose this new recruit in his or her first few critical weeks. Remember that starting a new job ranks right up there in the stress hierarchy. Our goal is to foster that staff members growth and bonding with the team.

## Training and Mentoring

Technicians can design their own "Train to Retain" program within their hospitals. Take charge of it, organize it and set up binders for new staff to work through with daily check off lists where new staff can view videos, read manuals, take hospital

tours, work through safety measures, meet with reps, or mentor with key staff in areas where they shine.

Staff members will need to be asked if they would consider this extra load but most see the benefit and will volunteer their time during the workday freely. Many staff have commented that they would have liked this kind of hands on orientation and training when they were new. Remember, to be successful - this program will need the support of owners and managers to ensure all staff members receive the benefit of this program before being “unleashed” on clients or their pets.

Develop a collection of orientation binders in conjunction with key staff members that are set up by 'weeks'. If you run a 4 week program, the new staff member would know that they are to grab the first binder and set to work checking items off their orientation list, for their position, starting on their first day. This takes much of the stress out of those first few weeks as both staff and the new recruits understand what is expected of them. As well, this ensures all staff members have time to read through policy manuals and to understand and learn procedures in advance rather than “on the fly”

There are many excellent resources available to help you build your training program. Before running out to purchase any, check your own hospitals library. Many times the resources are there but just need to be organized into one training and orientation section with videos provided by companies within the industry, textbooks, models, manuals and interactive CD's all set up on one shelf clearly labeled “Orientation and Training”. If you do require additional resources, check out the following web sites:

[www.lifelearn.com](http://www.lifelearn.com)

[www.vetmedteam.com](http://www.vetmedteam.com)

[www.ivsonline.ca](http://www.ivsonline.ca)

[www.4act.com](http://www.4act.com)

Get started now and feel the pride of mentoring!