8 ways to successfully manage human resources

By Morgan Hughley
Head Content Writer, ConnectPay

OMSs already have a lot on their plate. It is understandable human resources (HR) management – although a necessary component of running a practice – may not be top of mind.

However, a comprehensive HR management plan is vital to ensure employees are taken care of and a practice remains compliant, reducing any chance of costly litigation.

To make the most out of an HR plan, the following are eight considerations to keep in mind:

■ **Talent acquisition takes time, consideration** – First and foremost, managing the hiring process is a vital component of HR. Start by writing, branding and distributing job descriptions online. Be sure to keep applications simple and streamlined, as a poorly designed online application can deter up to 60 percent of applicants from applying for the role, despite interest in the position itself.

Once applications arrive, it may be tempting to accelerate the hiring process and skip seemingly less important steps to fill a role as soon as possible. But doing so puts one at risk for hiring the wrong individual for the job (while simultaneously missing out on other top talent). Take your time, ask questions that matter to the practice and be transparent about your offerings to find the best-suited individual to complement your team.

Background checks also are recommended when hiring new talent, as they help with making the most informed decisions for the practice. A trusted background check solution can be used to vet prospective employees, examining their criminal background, employment history and references.

■ **Efficient onboarding maximizes retention** – Once the right employee is hired for the practice, a smooth onboarding process is essential when building a successful team. Employee retention starts at onboarding. All new employees need to have the required tools, resources and support to transition into their new position comfortably – only then will they be able to thrive moving forward. Otherwise, both employees and the practice are set up for failure.

A digital talent management program is an important tool to use, allowing an employer to oversee the onboarding process and track when new hires complete their tasks. Employees can be pre-boarded before their start date with assigned paperwork and other related tasks via an online portal. This will free up time on their first day, giving new hires more opportunities to learn about their role, meet team members and adapt to the functions of the practice.

While establishing a standardized onboarding process is important, the experience also can be personalized to each employee. Try to learn more about the new hire's strengths and passions to tailor the experience to the new hire.

Once the employee has been fully onboarded, ask for feedback on the process and make necessary adjustments. Continue to perform periodic check-ins with the employee, gauging his or her experience and increased comfort levels as time progresses.

■ **Handbook protects employees, company** – An employee handbook introduces a practice's mission, vision, policies, procedures and culture to new hires while serving as a guidepost for employees and managers alike. Not only does the employee handbook set the stage for new employees, outlining a practice's values and expectations, but it also provides HR managers with a go-to way to handle delicate internal conflicts on an ongoing basis,

continued on next page

serving as a simple reference tool when managing difficult employee situations.

Many pieces of the employee handbook – such as work schedules, employee benefits, attendance, timekeeping, technology usage, conflict resolution and dress code – are established at the practice level. Other applicable inclusions – such as mandates on pay equity, minimum wage, paid sick leave, anti-discrimination, harassment and reasonable accommodation – must be made based on federal, state and local laws.

Consistently updating the employee handbook is important to reflect the latest changes in labor laws and practice policies. Per HR best practices, employers should review and update their employee handbooks at least annually. However, some items may call for more immediate action, especially when legal compliance is involved. Employees should sign off they have read the employee handbook at the beginning of the onboarding process and when significant changes are made.

■ **Compliance training cultivates healthy environment** – OMS practices should embrace the processes and technology needed to effectively manage compliance on an ongoing basis. Better compliance management practices will enable practices to identify, develop and retain not just all employees, but the right ones.

Not only does compliance training set expectations for employees, but it also shows the practice actively tries to prevent harassment and discrimination in the workplace, guarding the practice against potential lawsuits brought on by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

HR management tools are available that can offer a practice a suite of online employee training, including training for sexual harassment prevention, workplace violence prevention, diversity and cybersecurity. Beyond employee training, compliance training covers the ins and outs of important federal compliance requirements, including the Family and Medical Leave Act, COBRA and HIPAA laws. In unison with this training, current federal and state-specific labor law posters should be posted in the practice, allowing employees to easily see updates.

■ **Accurate timekeeping reduces administrative headaches** – Under the Fair Labor Standards Act, you must pay non-exempt employees for all hours worked, retaining their payroll records. By using a digital time and attendance solution to monitor time tracking, a practice can ensure time is logged accurately and employees are paid correctly. This can help increase employee trust, eliminate "time theft," improve workforce oversight and save money by controlling labor costs.

Digital solutions are typically preferred over paper timecards. Time tracking software allows staff to easily clock in from any authorized computer, monitors punches with GPS-accurate mobile tracking and provides a simple way to approve, adjust and search payroll records.

■ **PTO increases satisfaction** – A time and attendance solution allows tracking overtime or paid time off (PTO) under one unified system. PTO – including paid holidays, vacation days and sick time – is a key attribute of workplace satisfaction.

Although no federal law requires businesses to provide vacation days, state laws vary, and attracting better talent is easier with a solid PTO offering.

A practice can handle PTO in a few ways. For example, vacation and sick days can be separated or lumped together as one package. In addition, an employee's time off can be allotted annually or accrued over the year based on the number of hours worked. Typically, an accrual program is recommended as it usually results in better cash flow for a practice.

■ **Good benefits help a practice stand out** – To track and retain the best staff, employers also are encouraged to offer a comprehensive employee benefits package. For understanding the best benefits package for a practice, a capable insurance broker can lay out the available options.

For health programs, a Flexible Spending Account, Health Reimbursement Account or a Health Savings Account can be offered to employees.

In addition, to take advantage of employee tax savings, businesses need to establish a Section 125 Plan to allow employees to pay for their group health plans with pre-tax salary deductions.

Beyond health benefits, a 401(k) plan is a convenient and effective way for employees to save for the retirement they envision. Employees can make traditional 401(k) contributions with pretax dollars or use a Roth 401(k) plan in which contributions are made with post-tax dollars so employees can make tax-free withdrawals in retirement. Some 401(k) plans also offer companies special tax breaks, so consulting with an insurance broker is encouraged.

■ **Confidentiality breaches could pose major consequences** – HR professionals must hold themselves to the highest standards for confidentiality. Often, employee information is highly sensitive and must be protected against data breaches and unauthorized disclosure. Consequences could include regulatory penalties for noncompliance, loss of employee trust and even lawsuits.

It is important to maintain two confidential HR files – a general file and a private file. The general file can house employment applications, offer letters, performance reviews, emergency contact forms and payroll records for the past three to five years.

The private HR file must keep background checks, drug test results, medical records, benefit enrollment forms, litigation or termination documents, workers' compensation claims, payroll verification requests and Form I-9. If a breach in confidentiality ever is questioned, it is good practice to have a trusted employment lawyer to turn to whenever further advice is needed.

While managing HR takes careful consideration, these tips should give your practice a clear path to success as you begin to craft your compliance management plan. ■

If you are interested in more comprehensive HR support for your practice, AAOMS Advantage Partner ConnectPay provides all new clients with six months of free access to its HR Resource Center. Additional information on HR solutions is available at ConnectPayUSA.com/AAOMS.

This is number 180 in a series of articles on practice management and marketing for oral and maxillofacial surgeons developed under the auspices of the Committee on Practice Management and Professional Staff Development and AAOMS staff. Practice Management Notes from 2002 to present are available online at AAOMS.org.