EXECUTIVE DECISIONS IN

DERMATOLOGY

APRIL & MAY 2020

Issue Focus: Operational Success

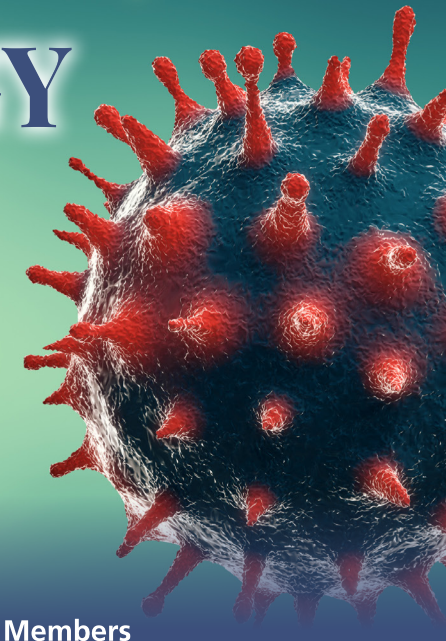
NAVIGATING COVID-19

INTERACTIVE NEWSLETTER

ADAM

Association of Dermatology Administrators & Managers

EXECUTIVE DECISIONS IN
DERMATOLOGY
APRIL & MAY 2020



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Interactive newsletter

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Executive Decisions in Dermatology is a bi-monthly publication of the **Association of Dermatology Administrators & Managers (ADAM)**. ADAM is the only national organization dedicated to dermatology administrative professionals. ADAM offers its members exclusive access to educational opportunities and resources needed to help their practices grow. Our 600 members include administrators, practice managers, attorneys, accountants and physicians in private, group and academic practice.

To join ADAM or for more information, please visit our website at ***ada-m.org****, call* ***866.480.3573****, email* ***ADAMinfo@samiworks.net****, fax* ***800.671.3763*** *or write Association of Dermatology Administrators & Managers,* ***5550 Meadowbrook Drive, Suite 210, Rolling Meadows, IL 60008.***

ADAM
Association of Dermatology Administrators & Managers

President's Corner

In the challenging time of this pandemic, we are inspired by the comradery and support within our ADAM membership. Members are sharing struggles, offering advice, contributing resources and even providing some lighthearted stress relief to fellow colleagues in our exclusive ADAM members-only Facebook Group. This is your private group to engage with and learn from other members. See a snapshot of the discussions on pages **6-7**. Be part of the conversation and share your own issues and/or solutions.

ADAM is here to be a resource. Many of your practices are closed at the moment, and potentially staff has been furloughed and patients aren't able to get care. We have pulled together a **COVID-19 ADAM** Member Resource webpage offering timely resources on telehealth, reimbursement, practice guidelines and much more. In addition, there is a lineup of live and on-demand webinars on topics ranging from coding, telemedicine, government loans, CARES Act and a series on innovative marketing efforts you can do now and tactics to help your practice recover following the pandemic. Access this valuable information on the resource webpage which is continually updated so check back often for the latest offerings.

This issue of *Executive Decisions in Dermatology* focuses on effective execution of business strategy, integrating strong organization structure, staff management and much more — all driving operational success. These best practices create consistency, improve efficiency, establish a stronger financial foundation and ultimately drive better patient care.

Features articles include content on:

- **Immediate Steps to Consider in the Face of the COVID-19 Crisis**
- **Cost-effective Tools to Increase Efficiency in Your Practice**
- **Optimizing Patient Flow**
- **Partnering with Your IT Company for Operational Success**
- **Wellbeing During a Pandemic: Oxymoron or Blessing?**
- **The Impact of Accountability on Culture and Engagement**

The ADAM Board of Directors also shares their own personal insight on top tactics for operational success. Discover their insights on pages **14-15** touching on communications, patient first methodology and staff investment.

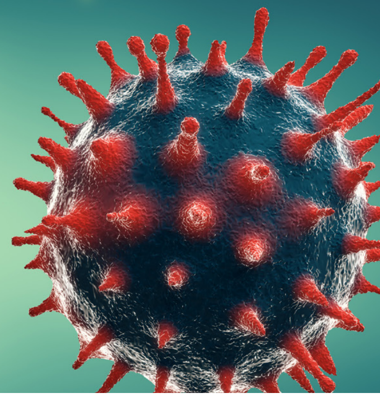
Originally, this issue was going to feature a robust recap of the 2020 ADAM Annual Meeting. With current unfortunate events, we have rescheduled the meeting for July 12-14. Our SAMI management team is continually evaluating options as the pandemic continues to impact gatherings and travel. We are hopeful the rescheduled meeting can go as planned but are realistic that we might have further revisions. Please stay tuned to the ADAM Intel emails and social media as this situation continues to evolve.

As a consequence of delaying our Annual Meeting, the new ADAM Board members announced in the previous issue could not start their new terms. We appreciate the continued efforts of our current Board members and the patience of our newest position holders. ADAM's full team is working together to ensure we continue to stand strong and united. There is power in membership, and we thank you for your dedication to our specialty, your practices and your patients.

Stay safe,

Tony Davis, ADAM President

Janice Smith, ADAM President-Elect



COVID-19 Resources for ADAM Members

ADAM has created a **new COVID-19 webpage** that brings ADAM members timely information and resources to help with:

- Practice shutdowns / slowdowns.
- In-office safety.
- Reimbursement-related changes.

Through this webpage, ADAM members can access complimentary educational webinars, details on the Economic Stimulus Packages and other helpful articles from government and medical authorities and experts.

The webpage is evolving daily, so please check back often for the latest information. A huge thank you to SAMI management team for their hard work in keeping ADAM leadership informed on pandemic developments.

Visit the new COVID-19 webpage at ***ada-m.org/covid-19-resources*** for valuable pandemic information essential to dermatology administrators.

ADAM Annual Meeting **Update**

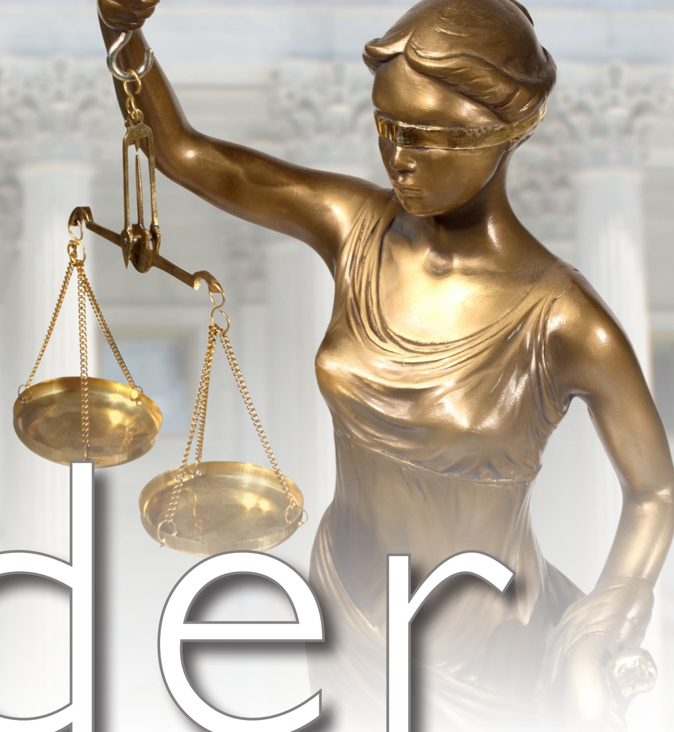
Due to the deepening concerns around travel and large group gatherings as it pertains to the COVID-19 virus, the ADAM Board of Directors and its management team at SAMI made the difficult decision to reschedule the **2020 ADAM Annual Meeting** in Denver.

The decision to reschedule was the result of many hours of discussion and negotiations with the Denver Hilton City Center, as well as those affected by this decision: valued members, sponsors, exhibitors and meeting faculty. The Board and Annual Meeting Committee did not want to jeopardize attendees and faculty health, nor the high quality content that attendees deserve and expect from the conference.

ADAM is a small and nimble organization with the ability to reschedule (versus cancel) its meeting. This is an opportunity that is not afforded to larger organizations, and the decision also kept ADAM's finances in tact with no lost revenue or hotel fees.

Stay tuned to ADAM Intel, social media posts and the **Annual Meeting webpage** for the latest details.

Federal Fodder



MIPS Reimbursement in 2020: Key Things to Know

Are you aware of how 2020 modifications to the Quality Payment Program (QPP) will impact your practice?

This 3-part series on the Merit-based Incentive Payment System (MIPS) by Clifford Warren Lober, MD, JD, provides important information. This content was originally published by the American Society for Dermatologic Surgery Association (ASDSA) in its monthly Advocacy e-newsletters.

PART 1 — MIPS Eligibility, Comparative Performance Score & Thresholds

PART 2 — Quality and Promoting Interoperability Measures

PART 3 — Improvement Activities, Cost Measures, Bonuses and Pearls

This article was written prior to the March 22 CMS announcement that stated practices with MIPS-eligible clinicians who have not submitted MIPS data by April 30 will automatically qualify for the extreme and uncontrollable circumstances policy and will receive a neutral payment adjustment for the 2021 MIPS payment year. If a clinician or group began submitting data but will not be able to complete it by April 30, 2020, he/she should submit an **application** for extreme and uncontrollable circumstance citing COVID-19 to have previously submitted data overridden. Applications must be submitted between April 3–30. Also see the **Quality Payment Program COVID-19 Response fact sheet** for more information.

Find the latest advocacy-related information on ADAM's COVID-19 webpage at ***ada-m.org/covid-19-resources***.

For questions, please reach out to ***advocacy@samiworks.net***. ■

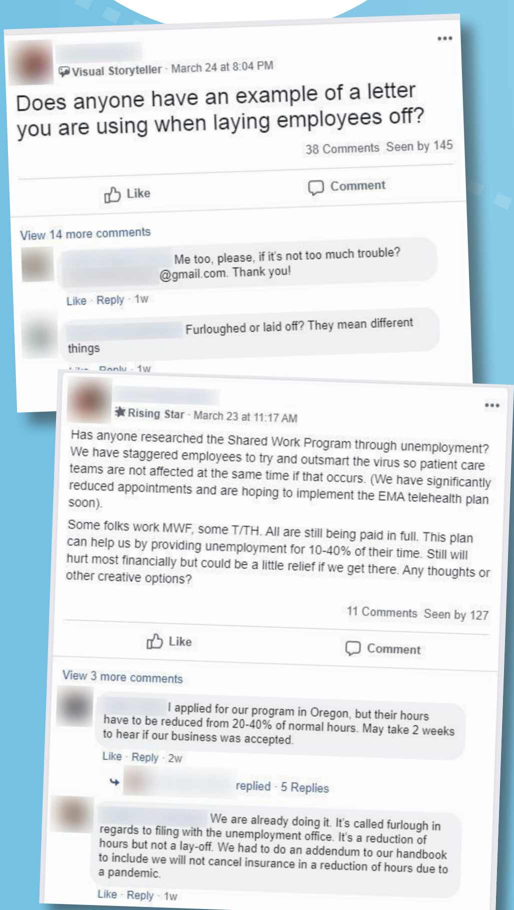
Disclaimer

The materials presented here are for informational purposes only and not for the purpose of providing legal advice. You should contact your attorney to obtain advice with respect to any particular issue or potential risk.

SOLUTIONS FOR ASSOCIATION MANAGEMENT, INC.

The SAMI Advocacy and Practice Affairs Team is dedicated to education and advocacy on behalf of dermatology practice managers and their patients.

Get CONNECTED: COVID-19 EDITION



ADAM's members-only Facebook group is extremely active with hot topics surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and posts being seen by an average of over 100 members. Here are some of the conversations:

- How are you handling collections for the short term and mid term? Are you still sending accounts over with the same criteria as normal times or have you modified your criteria?
- We use a third party HR company and they are not being very helpful at the moment so I am turning to you all for your experiences.
  - If a staff member is applying for unemployment due to a reduction in their hours or no hours are they still entitled to their benefits?
  - If a staff member is working limited hours and they are less than 50%, will it affect their unemployment benefits? Or can they still get the full benefit?
- Has anyone submitted for MIPS? Can anyone confirm submission extension?
- Can anyone recommend a service for sending HIPAA compliment mass text messages?
- It sounds like we're many of us are in the same boat. How you plan to mitigate the "employee meltdown" that's going to occur when they start to realize we are laying people off? Do you meet with everyone individually? Do a team meeting? Not say anything and deal with it all one person at a time? I'm not sure the best way to tell them is all together that this could be happening and then they just have to hold on to see if they get called in? That would be horrible......What are your thoughts? The txt message river runs fast when so so news is at stake. What have you done or what do you plan to do if you are currently in this boat? Any advice is greatly appreciated!
- Is anyone aware of letters we should provide our staff to have in their cars in case our area becomes mandated to lock down? It would be stating that they need to come to work due to medical necessity in case pulled over. I am in KS. Anyone running into this?

- We have a provider that we are canceling their scheduled days because of lack of patients and one who had to quarantine until return of test results. They are asking to use CME days??? What is the standard of practice? Advice appreciated.

- The AAD just released new guidance for Derm practices. We have made the difficult decision to do what is best for our patients and staff by offering urgent services only and moving all routine applicable visits to Telehealth. We will continue to do Mohs and skin cancer surgery with aggressive cancer types and see patient with worsening rashes, infections etc. Such a hard choice, but the right one to make.

- My doc posed a great question over the weekend. How do we keep morale up during this crazy time? What are you doing for your staff? Let's brainstorm and come up with some creative ideas!

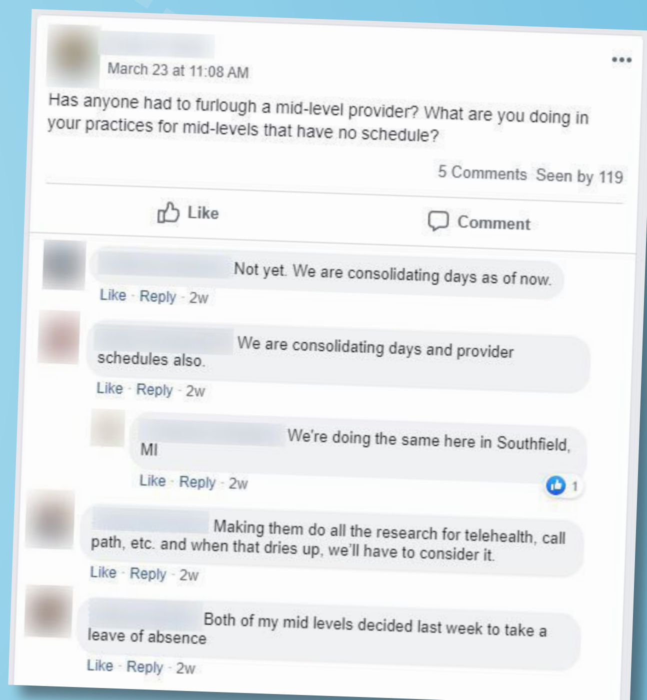
- I just want to let you all know how much I appreciate my invaluable colleagues at ADAM. Your courage (yes, it is courage!) to put personal needs to the side and do what's best for your organization and the families that rely on your management skills for their livelihoods SHOULD NOT go unappreciated and unrecognized. I am reminded that we should be coming off the high of having just finished our wonderful Annual Conference in Denver and taking all that learning and new connections back to our practices. However, "the virus that shall not be named" prevented that. Yet, we will not be deterred and I hold out strong hope that we can all convene in 4 months and rebuild what feels so broken right now! My love, thoughts and prayers to all!

- I just wanted to say how proud I am of our community! Each and every one of you have worked tirelessly to get us through a week that none of us have ever experienced before. Staff and patients likely have no idea the amount of work that has been done behind the scenes, but we all do. Thank you for all that you've done and are continuing to do! Thank you for sharing your questions, ideas and positivity in this group. Your work is appreciated. YOU are appreciated!

- Does anyone on paper charts have a checklist for Telehealth visits?

- For those of you who are doing telemedicine, how are you handling copays? Do you charge a self pay patient the same as what you would for a visit in the office?

- I am really surprised at the number of patients we are still seeing - especially surprised by the amount of our 65+ patients. We are trying to not have a full waiting room, are offering to call patients when they are next so they can wait in their cars. I think my MD is trying to stay open as long as possible. I know that dentists and orthodontists were recommended to close. Do any of you expect that derms will eventually be "non-essential"?



Join the conversation at

facebook.com/groups/AssociationofDermAdminsandManagers

Immediate Steps to Consider in the Face of the COVID-19 Crisis

Glenn Morley joined BSM Consulting in 2017 as a Senior Consultant, providing ongoing support to facial plastic and reconstructive surgeons, and dermatologists. Her areas of expertise include practice flow and efficiency, new physician integration and new practice start-up. Glenn has been an ADAM speaker since 2011.

Author's note: The coronavirus outbreak is first and foremost a societal tragedy, affecting hundreds of thousands of people and profoundly impacting both the national and global economy. This article is intended to provide medical practice leaders with a perspective on the evolving situation and implications for their companies. Since the outbreak is moving quickly, some of the perspectives in this article may fall rapidly out of date. With that said, this article reflects our perspective as of March 30.

By Glenn Morley

With the spread of COVID-19 and shelter-in-place orders in effect, we have entered uncharted territory. It feels impossible for any of us to accurately predict the depth and breadth of the challenges that lie ahead. This article intends to offer hope by providing some tangible actions practice managers can take now to ensure near-term business survival while creating a more stable foundation for the future

Create a COVID-19 Task Force for the Practice

This team should include individuals who can remain calm, offer a considerate and thoughtful perspective and keep discussions confidential. This group is likely to include the owner(s), practice administrator, bookkeeper or accountant, attorney and HR specialist.

Preserve Cash

We don't yet know the depth or breadth of the COVID-19 disruption, and as such, practice leaders should make cash preservation the highest priority to protect the integrity of their organization. Start by completing a rolling **13-week cash flow forecast**. Besides the forecast, there are others that must be considered when creating a workable cash management and preservation plan. To put yourself in the best position, also do the following:

- **Contact your bank.** Look to increase or establish a business line of credit to provide your organization with an additional financial buffer. Consider drawing down against this line of credit to shore up your cash position, even if you do not currently need the funds. Applying for a line of credit and a small business loan can happen concurrently.
- **Review the recently passed CARES Act.** This piece of legislation was signed into law on March 27, and it contains many provisions that impact private practices. Specifically, the Paycheck Protection Program is geared to help small businesses cover payroll expenses, mortgage interest or rent payments and utilities. **This summary sheet** outlines the Small Business Administration (SBA) loan eligibility, requirements, terms and forgiveness under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act.
- **Create a zero-based budget.** Developed by Peter Pyhrr in the 1970s, zero-based budgeting starts from scratch with a "zero base" for each line item in your budget. From there, the need and cost of every function within an organization is analyzed and funds are allocated with today's situation in mind, regardless of how much money was previously budgeted for any given line item.[1] Questions you might ask as you analyze each line item include: Do we need a cleaning service if the lights are out? Do we need a pay-per-click marketing program at a time when families are concerned about mortgages or rent? A valuable off-shoot of completing a zero-based budget is the resulting analysis that differentiates between critical and non-critical functions during a downturn. Critical functions are those that have a direct impact on your business, such as maintaining the right level of patient support service to answer patient phone calls and manage provider's schedules. Non-critical functions simply support the overall business plan (e.g., advertising in a regional magazine).

- **Perform a payroll/team analysis.** For most of us, payroll is the biggest expense in the budget. Since most revenue has come to a grinding halt, you are going to have to make difficult decisions about which employees to layoff or furlough.
- **Elect to forgo compensation.** Many practice owners have elected to stop taking a paycheck entirely. This has meant making significant adjustments in their personal lives as they put practice sustainability first. We have heard from many managers that on the heels of owners deciding to forgo their own compensation, it has been somewhat less painful to ask staff to take pay cuts and announce layoffs.
- **Reach out to venders and lenders** (including credit card companies). Inquire about an interest-only payment plan, deferred payment plan, reduced payment plan or longer payment terms. You can also see if debt payment relief programs are available.
- **Talk to landlords.** Similar to lenders, your landlord may be open to working through a partial rent deferral plan that may or may not lengthen the term of your lease. While having this conversation, remember these landlords typically have mortgages that must be paid.
- **Review your business interruption insurance.** Contact your carrier to verify this is a covered event. From what we're hearing, most policies only consider it a covered event if the surgeon is disabled from the COVID-19 virus, but it's worth exploring. Meanwhile, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) announced on March 29 that it is expanding its current Accelerated and Advanced Payment Program to increase cash flow to providers of services impacted by COVID-19. **Read this CMS fact sheet to learn more.**

Explore New or Enhanced Revenue Opportunities

During challenging economic times, businesses must be flexible and address current needs to generate revenue. Below are some avenues practices can investigate to help them weather this event.

- **Implement telehealth visits.** On March 17, CMS released a **notice** on broadening access to Medicare telehealth services so that beneficiaries can receive a wider range of services from their doctors without having to travel to a health care facility. In addition, the 1135 waiver has been implemented, allowing Medicare to pay for office, hospital and other visits furnished via telehealth across the country, including from a patient's place of residence, starting March 6. The established patient criteria rules have also been relaxed during this national emergency.[2] Based on your practice's ability to operationalize telehealth, you may be able to replace portions of lost revenue with this service line on your 13-week cash flow forecast.
- **Offer online gift cards and product sales.** Based on my practice consulting experience, many practices sell more than $1 million in skin care products each year. If you do not currently have an online store, talk to the larger skin care product vendors, as some can quickly facilitate a turnkey online store for you to manage and fulfill skin care orders virtually. Using this time to focus on the set up of an online store will pay dividends in the form of long term passive revenue as well as valuable patient engagement.

Adjust Operations to Meet Current Practice Needs

Align organizational needs with the right size COVID-19 operations team. Assess the current needs of your practice and consider how and who can best serve those altered needs in this unusual time. Examples of operational adjustments include:

- **Transitioning from in-person operations to remote.** As practices start to provide remote services, it is important to refer to the telehealth policy provided by the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) and ensure appropriate precautions are being taken to maintain the security and privacy of practice information and Protected Health Information (PHI).[3] Consider providing remote workers a practice laptop that is used exclusively for practice work, rather than employees having to use a home computer shared by family members.
- **Temporarily suspending regular compliance efforts.** You may need to postpone your usual compliance commitment activities (e.g., internal chart auditing and internal policy reviews) due to pandemic activities and reduced staff. We advise creating a memo stating this hold and adding it to your compliance plan. Once compliance activity commitments can resume, place a reinstatement memo to the compliance plan.
- **Checking with your phone vendor about remote options.** Today's phone systems provide portability, which allow business calls to be answered from remote locations. If your phone system does not allow for this, explore a call forwarding option should the office close completely and a remote operations team needs to manage calls.

Scale Back Staff and Payroll

When making cuts, seek experienced human resources and legal counsel to ensure you do not unknowingly jeopardize your practice or employees. On a person-by-person basis, you will be faced with a variety of considerations, starting with:

- Which employees will you need to retain to meet current operational needs?
- Will you need to ask retained staff to take a pay cut, or, if they are non-exempt employees, work fewer hours?
- Which employees are not essential for current operational needs?
- Will non-essential staff be laid off, or will some or all be furloughed?
- How can you avoid losing your best employees while they are furloughed?

Offer Team and Patient Support

This is not a time to go silent. Be present and communicate frequently with compassion when discussing the impact of practice closures. Retention of valuable team members and patients when practice operations resume will be tied directly to how you conduct yourself as a leader through this difficult time.

The impact of COVID-19 on medical practices and small businesses is impossible to assess in this early stage. However, as BSM founder and CEO Bruce Maller says, "The job before us all now is to educate ourselves and create plans that are capable of managing today's challenges while keeping an eye on the weeks and months ahead." As leaders, you will be making some very challenging decisions regarding finances, personnel and technology soon. By taking a calm, thoughtful and strategic approach you will persevere through this and be set to thrive in the future.

References

1. *myaccountingcourse.com/accounting-dictionary/zero-based-budgeting*
2. *cms.gov/newsroom/fact-sheets/medicare-telemedicine-health-care-provider-fact-sheet*
3. *aad.org/member/practice/telederm/toolkit*

Wellbeing During a Pandemic: Oxymoron or Blessing?

Mary Kruse, MS, is the CEO/Owner of HealthSource Solutions, a provider of comprehensive worksite wellness services and staffing solutions. Thirty years of worksite wellness expertise, coupled with energy and the mission to "enrich employee wellbeing," makes for a highly passionate and dynamic leader.

By Mary Kruse

As a small business owner, navigating the past few weeks has been scary, challenging and unsettling. Yet, my amazing staff has showed me the silver linings! The rat-race of life has slowed, and many people are experiencing the consistency of "real" family time — eating dinner together, participating in game nights, virtual happy hours, getting outside to be active or connecting with loved ones through video. Wow, in dire times, good things do happen! We have all slowed down to appreciate the simple joys of life. This is wellbeing at its best!

During this unprecedented time, now – more than ever – we need to help our employees navigate through this uncertainty. This is a perfect time to utilize existing resources, provide support to staff while working from home and lead with transparency and reassurance.

Employee wellness is about supporting employees in all aspects of their lives – physical, mental, emotional, financial, family and community. Organizational wellness is about weaving this support into the fabric of your practice. There's a great deal of data that supports the business case for wellness programs, as well as the significant correlation to high performing organizations (HPO). Companies who have invested in building a strong wellness foundation are finding that the services and resources they already provide are the ones employees need most right now.

Promote Key Benefit Resources

Reach out to your health plan, benefits broker, EAP and wellness vendor to compile a list of services and resources to which employees have access. Send employees information on how to connect to these resources by email, mail to their homes or post on your intranet / employee portal. It's okay to over-communicate; on average, it takes seven times for a message to be grasped by the recipient. Here are some benefits you could promote:

- **Health plan offerings** – Nurse lines, telemedicine and COVID-19 testing locations (if applicable)
- **Mental health services** – EAP, crisis hotlines or other venders such as Ginger and Live to Learn
- **Financial consultants** – EAP, 401K providers, financial planners
- **Community services** – food shelves and pantries, daycares, emergency shelters and public health phone number and/or website
- **Human resources offerings** – crisis match, pay advancements, conversation with HR

Promote Community Connection

The power of community giving not only makes a positive impact in the lives of others, it gives employees a sense of purpose during this uncertain time. It's uplifting to see that during this difficult time people are pulling together. Share this good news by creating an avenue for employees to post their activities online. Pictures say 1,000 words! Request photos of them getting groceries for a neighbor, delivering meals to a school-age child, donating blood (there's a shortage!), stocking food pantry shelves or virtually connect with an elder. The power of sharing these activities and stories is inspiring and will draw everyone closer.

Promote Fun at Home

A quarantine at home is foreign for most. If you have kids, it adds another dimension. Encourage staff to explore new things with their families like digital escape rooms, virtual zoo and museum tours, Instagram cooking classes, movie streaming nights, video chats with neighbors, etc. Again, encourage employees to post them on a virtual board for your practice to share and stay engaged while social distancing.

Get Physically Active

For everyone, regular physical activity remains an important strategy for staying healthy. Being active helps nourish your body mentally, physically and emotionally. Be creative! Set up an indoor/outdoor obstacle course; dance to some tunes, try a new fitness app, explore a new walking path or make a bingo card with different activities for each day.

What irony that a pandemic has forced us to hyper-focus on our own wellbeing. To slow down and spend time together, be outdoors, cherish good health and find the pace of life a bit more manageable. I encourage you to find the silver lining and support employees in doing the same! ■

Optimizing Patient Flow

Toni J. Eberhardt is the Vice President of Marketing and Client Operations for UniteRx, a dermatology point-of-care dispensing solutions company. With a marketing career spanning 25 years, she has spent more than half of it in healthcare in leadership roles in companies including McKesson, Banner Health and FastMed Urgent Care. She graduated from Arizona State University with a Bachelor of Science in Marketing and holds a Master of Business Administration.

By Toni J. Eberhardt

Patient flow through a practice from check-in to check-out may seem like an organic process, but, as astute practice administrators recognize, it is like conducting an orchestra; one person being "out of tune" can have a tremendous impact. Optimizing patient flow can increase patient satisfaction and improve practice efficiency. According to a study in the journal **Health Affairs**, patient-flow strategies can also be used to manage fluctuations in demand, reduce costs and boost revenue.

An effective patient flow strategy ensures that practices operate at full capacity, physicians optimize time with patients, and time-wasting processes are minimized. **ZocDoc** identified five opportunities to optimize patient flow. Below, we have listed those opportunities and provided guidance as to how each can be applied to a dermatology practice.

1. Physical access to the practice: Make it easy.

From locating your practice to parking, understand your patients' potential challenges.

- If the practice is in a medical office complex, provide visual clues as to where the practice is located, i.e. "the back of the building on the side closest to Main Street."
- Is parking a challenge? If yes, request designated patient parking for your practice from the property manager; if that's not possible, advise new patients to allow extra time to park or provide them with hints as to where parking spaces are generally available.
- Coordinate with the property manager to have directional signs in the parking lot, building lobby, etc. so patients can easily find your practice.
- Ensure that a "drop-off" area is available near the entrance for patients that have physical mobility limitations.

2. Patient flow inside the practice: Direct traffic.

Patient privacy goes beyond HIPAA. Minimize the instances of patients crossing paths by having separate check-in and check-out areas. Ensure the number of patients checking in does not become backed up by spacing appointments appropriately, having enough front office staff based on the number of providers and appointments daily and having appropriate signage and directions in the waiting area to educate patients on the check-in process. When patients cross paths, frustration and/or anxiety can increase, thereby decreasing efficiency and patient satisfaction.

3. Optimize appointments for the patient: Prioritize appointments.

When thinking about appointments, the natural thought is the length of different types of appointments, the number of appointments each provider can handle and how to manage both versus the number of available exam rooms. One way to optimize appointments for both the patient and the provider is through proactive review of appointments the day prior, especially for existing patients. As the provider and practice get to know patients, make notes to help optimize appointments; for example, does a patient require more time and information? Is there a patient consistently early or late? Is another patient one who is more efficient, allowing the appointment to generally take less than the allotted time? What is the reason for the appointment, and has the patient encountered this medical issue in the past? Prior day review of scheduled patients by the provider can enable slight adjustments or expectations to be set as patients arrive.

4. Incorporate space and/or tools for provider documentation: Have a home base.

According to the **Annals of Family Medicine**, providers are "tethered to the electronic health records (EHR)" and spend more than 50% of their day on EHR tasks; this phenomenon is not exclusive to primary care. Having a mobile tablet or setting up a workstation in the provider flow enables paperwork and documentation to be completed in a timely and efficient manner, mitigating the need for providers to go back to their offices to input information.

5. Maintain forward flow: Identify bottlenecks.

Shadow each participant in the patient flow, including the patient, provider, medical assistants and administrative staff to identify where the patient flow is interrupted or delayed. In doing so, opportunities to adjust the workflow can be surfaced, as well as opportunities to augment operations with services and/or solutions to decrease bottlenecks.

For example, according to multiple studies, medical practices spend a significant amount of time on human resources managing pharmacy calls, faxes and pharmacy-initiated changes to patients' formularies. In fact, one study found clinicians spend two hours weekly consulting with patients about medications and costs, nearly two hours working on prior authorization forms and an hour working to understand drug pricing for patients (Source: 2018 Impact Report: Prescription Price Transparency, from Surescripts). To address this bottleneck, some dermatology practices have implemented a "Prescription Help Desk," enabling not only visibility to pharmacy benefits, but allowing the practice to dispense prescriptions to the patient at the point-of-care. By implementing an in-office dispensary, these practices have eliminated a bottleneck for the providers, staff and patients, resulting in cost savings for the practice, increased patient satisfaction, improved therapy adherence and increased revenue for the practice. ■

Ask the LAWYER Q&A

with Michael J. Sacopulos, JD
Medical Risk Institute

Service and Comfort Animals

Question: I manage a dermatology practice with several locations in the Northeast. Occasionally, we have patients that come in with a service animal. Recently, we have had patients come in with several odd companions. One patient had a turtle in her pocket which she claimed was a "comfort animal." Another patient appeared at our practice with a rather large parrot and informed my staff it served as an "emotional support" pet. Do we really have to allow all these various creatures into our practice? I am trying to run a medical practice, not a zoo. Before I set a policy, I thought I should ask about what rules or laws may govern this area. Thanks for the help.

Answer: I understand your desire to follow in the footsteps of Saint Patrick and "drive the snakes" out of Ireland. My wife and I recently watched, slack jawed, as Deborah Norville reported on a man that has an emotional support alligator. The alligator accompanies him to public places and generally makes others feel uncomfortable. Unfortunately, Ms. Norville did not ask the hard hitting questions that I wanted to know. Where does one purchase an emotional support alligator? What are the underlying conditions which necessitate an emotion support alligator? These are the type of questions that haunt me at 2:00 a.m.

As much as I would like to make fun of this issue, I completely understand that it is one that you have to deal with as a practice administrator. There are two legal categories of animals of which we need to be aware. When a patient appears at your practice with some type of animal, the first question to ask is, "Is this a service animal or a comfort animal?" The two categories have very different rights and ramifications:

1. **Service animals** are specially trained. They are limited to dogs and (this is absolutely true whether you believe me or not) miniature horses and are covered by the Americans with Disability Act (ADA).
2. **Comfort animals** are not covered by ADA and are not limited in the type of animal that may be used. In general, their rights to use and present with such animals may be restricted except in certain areas. These areas relate to airline travel and housing/rental of a residence.

For service animals, ADA is very precise on what may and may not be asked. In fact, you are only legally entitled to ask two questions:

1. Is the animal required because of a disability?
2. What work or task has the animal been trained to perform?

You are not allowed to specifically ask about the person's disability. Remember also that service animals are restricted to dogs and miniature horses. The argument for miniature horses is that they have a significantly longer life expectancy than a dog and can be used to carry some weight and thus perform tasks that are useful to its owner. Much of the history of miniature horses as service animals comes from the military.

Emotional support animals are not covered under ADA. This means that you are not legally required to allow a non-service animal (emotional or comfort support) into your practice. It is your option. The patient with a turtle in her pocket likely did not present an issue to other patients or a distraction to staff and your practice could allow the turtle to remain. The loud parrot on the other hand was most likely a distraction to both your staff and other patients, so you could ask the patient to remove the parrot from the practice. Generally, these decisions are up to your discretion. If the animal is not bothersome to others, you might as well allow it and move forward. Obviously, issues of hygiene need to be considered in a medical practice.

For some time now, people have been getting certificates off the internet claiming that whatever pet or beast they have with them was medically necessary. In 2018, my home state of Indiana passed a law that requires that a physician's signature as to the need of an emotional support animal in the context of landlord/tenant laws. The physician must have a prior relationship with the patient. This seems to help do away with the fictitious certificates coming from internet providers. I think laws like this, while a step in the right direction, do create some confusion because people believe they apply across the board and not in just certain industries or market segments. Indiana's law would not apply to a dermatology practice.

One more word of caution: several years ago, a Pennsylvania ENT practice told a patient with an emotional support animal to leave with the rational that they treat patients with allergies and the animal would trigger allergies of some of their patients. The owner of the animal then complained to a local television station. If that was not bad enough, the television reporter contacted the practice and spoke to a physician. The physician proceeded to give patient information to reporter. This in turn triggered a privacy breach and HIPAA violation. Ultimately, the practice had to pay a fine because of this behavior. This is to say that other laws besides ADA apply in situations where animals enter your practice. HIPAA and privacy laws certainly still come into play when dealing with patients. This is a warning to be careful on what you say and to whom you say it.

I wish you much luck in dealing with the non-human creatures that visit your practice. I understand that this is somewhat tricky area of the law, and hopefully this guidance will be of some use. I wish you all the best. ■

Michael J. Sacopulos is the CEO of Medical Risk Institute (MRI). Medical Risk Institute provides proactive counsel to the healthcare community to identify where liability risks originate, and to reduce or remove these risks. He is the author of "Tweets, Likes, & Liabilities". He is a frequent national speaker and has written for Wall Street Journal, Forbes, Bloomberg and many publications for the medical profession. He may be reached at **msacopulos@medriskinstitute.com**.

Board of Directors INTERVIEW

What is your top tactic for achieving operational success?

Communication with the staff and providers is the key. If you want to successfully change a protocol, supplier or anything of substance, then you must ensure that everyone understands why the change is being made and the supporting rationale to effectively make the change. Buy in is always key!

ADAM Secretary / Treasurer
George E Smaistrla Jr, FHFMA CMPE CPC
Office Administrator
Texas Dermatology Specialists

At Front Range Dermatology Associates, we practice "Patient First Medicine." We partner with our patients and make them part of our healthcare team. Patients that are vested in their care have been shown to have a higher probability of compliance and success. In addition to that, we focus on our staff being a close second in priority. I have hired a staff of like-minded individuals that possess a "servant's heart" approach to everything they do. We love each other, celebrate our successes together and cry together when needed. We are family, and we may not have it all together, but together we have it all – and we are thankful for that every single day!

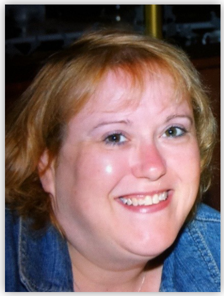
ADAM Vice President
Michele Blum
Practice Manager
Front Range Dermatology Associates

Communication is key to operational success, whether within one practice or across multiple practice locations. Pre-session huddles with providers and staff (in the morning and afternoon) are critical to set the tone and expectations for each clinic session. Using electronic communication tools during clinic sessions (such as Cisco Jabber) allow team members to update each other, ask for help and reach each other across the practice or between practices (for referrals or feedback). Focusing on and investing in communications within your practice(s) will ultimately increase efficiency and build stronger, cohesive teams and operations.

ADAM Board Member at Large
Virginia King-Barker
Chief Administrative Officer
Department of Dermatology, Duke University School of Medicine & Private Diagnostic Clinic, PLLC

One of the primary tools for operational success is communication. Whenever we are adopting something new, updating a process or protocol, we must communicate to our staff members so there is comprehensive understanding of what is happening and why. When staff have a better understanding, they are more willing to cooperate and work toward the common goal of operational success. Moreover, communicating to staff the expectations and projected outcomes give them a goal to work toward. Second to communication, assign additional responsibility to capable employees. This engenders trust for staff to have great "buy-in," leading to better cooperation and outcomes. Along with the initial communication, there must be follow up communication. We must communicate to the staff if they meet the goals and expectations. If staff met expectations and goals, they need to be rewarded. Oftentimes, staff do not need a monetary reward, verbal recognition goes a long way. For those that did not meet expectations, we need to communicate lessons learned and how we can improve next time.

ADAM Board Member at Large
Nichole R. Holoman, MHA
Director of Operations
MacInnis Dermatology



Our top tactic for operational success Is effective, timely and reciprocal communication. No matter what technology we incorporate into our practice, our success remains firmly tied to how well we communicate to our patients, staff and providers. It is also directly related to the timely feedback we get from these stakeholders. In order to promote great communication with our patients, we have a goal to respond to phone, email and MyChart messages within 48 hours of receipt. We also ask our patients about their in-office experience at the time of checkout. An email inviting them to fill out an anonymous survey is sent after their visti. With providers and staff, we have monthly staff meetings, daily huddles and emails as needed to convey changes and updates. We also send out surveys to obtain staff feedback on a variety of topics e.g., employee engagement ideas, changes in work processes, etc. In addition, we created small groups to tackle improving some of our most problematic work processes. These groups help identify issues and problem solve them quickly, recognize the staff and the processes that people find the most satisfying, and explore new ideas.

ADAM Board Member at Large
Elizabeth Edwards, MS
Department Administrator
University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center

The best strategy that I have found in achieving operational success is investing in my staff. Staff is an integral part of operations. Creating a healthy work environment that promotes a positive atmosphere where staff are respected, empowered and valued is important to operational success and the culture of the company. A good culture is created with strong core values and a solid mission statement. Help your staff understand the values, mission and goals of the company and how they play a part in achieving them. Hire good people that can commit to your core values; invest the time to train; give them the tools to be successful; recognize their strengths; hold them accountable and encourage them to grow. With this type of environment and culture, your staff will want to give their best. Invest in them and they will invest in the company's success. Your staff is a valuable asset! Finding good staff is hard, but keeping them shouldn't be.

ADAM Board Member at Large
Sarah Nielson, CPC, CPPM
Practice Administrator
Skin Cancer Specialists

INSIGHT

Obtain even more insights from ADAM's past Board Members in previous issues of *Executive Decisions*!

Partnering With Your IT Company for Operational Success

Byron Adams is Technology Director and Chief Technology Officer at AZCOMP Technologies. He can be reached at *badams@azcomp.com*.

By Byron Adams

Experience has shown me that most medical practices view their IT company as a vendor, not a strategic partner. That's because the common course of thinking is that an IT company doesn't provide the types of services that would be useful for a medical practice long term. If you don't change your mindset about what your IT company can actually do for you, then you'll never reap the benefits of having a true partnership that leads to operational success.

IT companies certainly play a role in fixing problems when they arise, but most are equipped to do so much more than that. Medical practices can strategically leverage their relationship with their IT company in ways that enable them to make the best technology decisions for their practice according to their needs, budgets, growth plans and overall business strategy.

Defining "Operational Success"

It's a broad term, and while its details look different for every practice, your operations are what make your business run and give you the ability to care for your patients. All operational success includes three important things: happy employees, good patient care and financial success.

Where Things Stand

In my 20 years working as an IT provider, I've seen medical practices fall into three distinctions when it comes to relationships with their IT companies.

1. **Problem Fixers:** When something goes awry, the practice pays their IT company to fix it. Once they've done that, they shelve them until the next technology problem arises.
2. **Administrative Keepers:** They have their IT company maintain and manage tools and programs on the practice's computers, and they also catch and fix things when they break. It's a little more proactive, but still reactive.
3. **Strategic Partners:** They work together to distinguish ongoing problems with software and technological operations, developing a system to improve workflow, business and budget plans for growth.

A strategic partnership should be the goal of every medical practice and IT company relationship, because it's the best way to aid you in creating happy employees and great patient care.

Happy Employees

In the **December/January 2020 edition of *Executive Decisions in Dermatology***, Laura Baldwin concluded her "Employee Engagement: A Key Success Factor in the Workplace" article with this statement: "In today's competitive environment, employee engagement can be the differentiator that sets your practice apart from the competition. Studies clearly show that organizations with engaged employees have less turnover; are more productive and profitable; and enjoy greater employee and customer satisfaction." Your employees are critical to all aspects of your practice, especially when it comes to patient care. If your technology isn't working well, you're going to have frustrated employees. Frustration kills productivity and affects every person who walks through your doors.

Great Patient Care

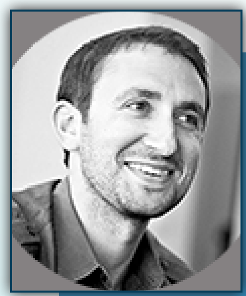
Successful and meaningful patient care isn't just dependent upon the outcome of the services provided. It also takes into account the experience the patient has while receiving that care. Great patient care before, during and after any office visit is key because patients make future decisions based upon the quality of service they feel they've received. That "quality of service" extends beyond medical services — it also has to do with in-office interaction. If your technological operations are optimized in a way that gives your patients what they need quickly and easily – like managing their schedules and records with ease – then they're going to feel taken care of and keep coming back.

Your Next Steps

1. Change your mindset. Look at your IT company as a strategic partner, not just a vendor.
2. Evaluate your current relationship with your IT company. Do they adhere to a set of technology standards? Do they have the ability to be the strategic partner you need?
3. If they do, work with them to evaluate and formulate a long-term IT plan that will help your operations. If they don't, it's time to hire a new IT company that can.

In order to achieve operational success, create happy employees and provide great patient care, there are a lot of moving pieces that need to work together. When it comes to technology, there are certain tools and practices you need to implement consistently to successfully run your practice. Doing so can achieve near-predictable results, increase productivity, decrease frustration and better patient experience. All of these will almost assuredly have a positive impact on your bottom line, so use your IT company as a partner and not just a vendor. You both have a mutual goal to provide great service, so work together to achieve it! ■

Cost-effective Tools to Increase Efficiency in Your Practice



Jeremy Gilman is a co-founder and the chief marketing officer of RxVantage. Prior to RxVantage, Jeremy led the digital agency and customer experience division of DMI, a professional services firm. Prior to DMI, Jeremy was a partner at Pappas Group, a consultancy. Jeremy is a frequent speaker on digital transformation.

By Jeremy Gilman

Practice managers' responsibilities are never-ending, and it is more important than ever to be able to work quickly, adapt to changes and maximize efficiency while reducing costs. Learning how to automate manual tasks and utilize technology is essential, and medical practices look to optimize productivity without compromising accuracy, quality or effectiveness.

It can certainly seem overwhelming (who wants to learn another new software, right?) and potentially even out of range. However, spending 15 minutes to learn key tools can ultimately save your practice hours (or even days) of work each week, smoothing out workflows and allowing you to focus your attention on patient care and other, more urgent, matters.

Patient Scheduling and Intake

Integrating online appointment scheduling / booking into your suite of practice management software can help significantly simplify the practice's scheduling process. The right tool should let patients pick the available time most suitable for them, as well as be set up to send out automatic appointment reminders. In these uncertain times, tools that allow you to communicate new protocols, closures or appointment slots is crucial. Most tools will allow patients to cancel or reschedule appointments themselves. This frees up valuable time that would otherwise have been spent on the phone manually scheduling patients.

The tool should also offer **online patient intake**. The forms you require should collect information about the patient's demographics, insurance coverage, and emergency contacts, as well as other vital details. Online patient intake forms are filled before appointments — eliminating waiting-room rushes and reducing errors, which are common with manual entries. Furthermore, online or other remote intake processes ensure the safety of your staff and minimizes the risk of infectious disease contamination.

Rep Communication

During the COVID-19 outbreak, practices have dramatically increased their communication with their local reps through free online messaging platforms, such as RxVantage. Whether messaging reps as a group or individually, practices are efficiently providing real-time updates about evolving policies and protocols. What was previously viewed as a nice-to-have feature – finding and messaging the right reps as needed – has become an essential communication tool.

Furthermore, if your office meets with reps, hosts in-services or coordinates sample drops automated tools can eliminate manual tasks such as scheduling, communicating information and tracking visit history. **Many leading practices rely on reps** to provide crucial information about new therapies, side effects, technological innovations, coding and more, so implementing tools to manage these processes is key. Technology can also provide insights and tracking to **ensure these meetings are relevant**, compliant, and productive.

Insurance Eligibility Verification

Accurate insurance eligibility verification – one of the **first steps in billing** – can be challenging and time-consuming if done manually. Automated eligibility verification tools confirm insurance coverage, benefits and authorization information online before the patient's appointment. This does away with having to call insurers and payers, and it also speeds up the patient check-in process. These tools also allow for verification checks at any time during the patient's care journey with the practice.

Reputation Management

It can be a bit tedious to monitor a practice's reputation continuously, but it's necessary for growth and positive patient satisfaction. Patient reviews, to a large extent, determine a practice's reputation. **A recent study** reports that 59% of patients consider physician rating sites to be important in their decision-making process. Reputation management tools collate and alert you to patient reviews that mention the practice. This helps you **address negative reviews** faster. It also prevents reviews from falling through the cracks as is likely to happen during manual searches.

Quality Reporting

With most medical practices mandated to participate in the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' (CMS) Quality Payment Program (QPP), proper documentation of quality data has become necessary. Rather than face the almost impossible task of collecting quality data at the end of each performance year, you should invest in quality reporting software. These tools automatically track and record relevant data year-round in formats that allow for easy submission. The tool you pick should also be integratable with the practice's electronic health records (EHR) and billing software and should be certified by the Office of the National Coordinator (ONC) for Health Information Technology.

The goal is to boost productivity, so you should make sure to select tools and software whose vendors provide easily accessible customer support, resources and training. This way, you can become proficient in utilizing them optimally as quickly as possible.

The Impact of Accountability on Culture and Engagement

Creating a fantastic work culture and increasing employee engagement continue to rank at the top of every business and HR leader's workplace goals. These leaders should consider personal accountability and its relationship to and impact on culture and engagement. If leaders foster an environment of personal accountability, culture and engagement will naturally improve.

What is accountability?

Accountability is displayed in employees who clearly understand their goals and how they contribute to the mission and initiatives of the organization. They do whatever it takes to get the desired results. It's not about the time spent on projects, but rather the results generated. Also, those results are completed to a specific level of satisfaction, not just checked off a list. Determine the level of satisfaction in advance and ensure it is clearly understood. The employee needs to know the expectations of his/her manager, the organization and – most importantly – the patients.

How can leaders foster an environment of personal accountability?

Leaders must be transparent about their expectations for personal accountability and ensure every employee understands exactly what that means and how that looks. Encourage employees to "see it, own it, solve it and do it." Here are some tips and ways to get started:

Acknowledge How You Impact the Culture

This is a great time for leaders to model how to give and get good feedback. By having your employees practice giving you feedback on ways your actions may be affecting the organization's culture, you are not only learning from their input, but you are developing their skills and gathering insights on your impact of the culture. Acknowledge how you've contributed to any problems and consider ways your actions and behaviors can instead improve the culture.

Define How Each Role Impacts Your Organization

Clearly define the organization's initiatives and form goals for each role that contribute to those initiatives or the mission of the business. Continually review the employees' progress toward these goals to bring the focus back to how their roles contribute to the bigger picture. If an employee truly understands how his/her role, in conjunction with other positions, brings the mission of the company to life, he/she will be much more inclined to give 100% to the job. When leaders give their employees purpose, higher engagement and satisfaction will naturally follow.

Hire Accountable People

When hiring new employees, ensure they possess or have potential for personal accountability. Past behavior is always the best predictor of future behavior, so ask plenty of questions – from candidates and their references – that draw out past situations. Consider ways the candidate can prove their past accountability, including their ability to keep promises, consider consequences, take responsibility for mistakes and make amends for mistakes.

Get Managers in the Mindset to Help

Help your managers transition their thinking from holding others accountable to nurturing an environment where people are taking greater accountability. This will help foster a culture of employees that proactively self-select the appropriate actions needed to get the desired results.

Encourage Positive Thinking

Help employees seek joy in challenging circumstances instead of always looking at the negative. When individuals complain about current conditions, help them look at the situation differently. Positive thinking doesn't come naturally to many people, so practice is essential.

Stop the Blame Game

Your employees should feel empowered to make mistakes and not be afraid to learn from them. Instead of blaming, managers, leaders and colleagues should discuss ways to improve processes or projects and allow others to contribute for added buy-in.

Allow Creative Thinking

Leaders must allow employees to think creatively and come up with their own solutions rather than solve problems for them. Learn to ask open-ended questions to prompt problem-solving. When employees provide answers, they see the value they bring to the organization and will engage in responsibilities with more vigor and energy.

Delegate Authority

Once employees begins to demonstrate accountability, give them some power to make some decisions. For example, when you assign a project with specific expected results, allow the employee to choose the team, vendor or tools they will use and work with to get the work done. Give them the ownership they need to impact the results directly.

When you foster an environment where employees are encouraged and expected to focus on personal accountability, you are growing a team of engaged contributors. You'll begin to see a group of more efficient, creative and independent employees striving to do their best to contribute to the mission, vision and initiatives of your practice. ■

TANDEM HR

The HR experts at Tandem HR contributed to this article. Tandem HR is an IRS certified professional employer organization (CPEO) providing custom, high-touch human resource solutions to small and mid-size businesses. Our HR experts allow executives to focus on growing their business while we manage the administrative aspects of human resources like payroll processing, benefits administration, compliance, risk management, employee relations and much more. Learn more about how Tandem HR can have a significant impact on your business at **TandemHR.com** *or 630.928.0510.*

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