

# Managing an Optometric Practice

## Introduction to Management Skills

*Mary E. Schmidt*  
*EyeSystems Consultants*  
*President*

Being a good manager takes a lot of hard work and dedication. To be a good manager you have to have the desire to perform the necessary and required skills each and every day. Some days you may need to be a motivator other days a disciplinarian, sometimes a taskmaster and if you're lucky, some days you're allowed to let the team run well all by itself. Sometimes all those skills are used on the same day.

The question you need to ask yourself is, are you willing to do all those things?

The Office Manager position is a full time job all by itself. You can't be an optician, insurance biller or front desk coordinator and an Office Manager, you certainly can't be the Doctor and effectively oversee the day to day activities of the staff. To be an effective office manager you'll need to know all the activities within the practice. It's your job to insure that all tasks are accomplished and each staff member stays is working to their fullest potential. Once this is accomplished the next big responsibility is long term planning and growth of the staff and the practice. The office manager should not be chosen by seniority, evaluate everyone including outside candidates and choose the staff member with the best skill set to manage people and tasks.

Ask these questions to determine who has the best skill set.

Who will...?

Encourage staff members to learn new skills?

Guide staff members to assume responsibility for their actions?

Create enthusiasm...for the new charting system? New technology?

Set the best example for a good employee?

Help others learn the best way to perform all their duties?

Ask other to give input?

How does an office manager do these things?

*How do you encourage a staff member to learn new skills?*

*Don't place blame when mistakes are made.* Staff often hesitates to try new things when they fear being blamed for mistakes. It should be okay to learn from a mistake as long as they don't keep repeating it. But remember that it takes adults **twenty one attempts** at a new behavior before it becomes comfortable.

*Require each staff member to learn three new skills per year and report on their new knowledge at your staff meetings.* If there is an accountability to grow and learn in the practice everyone must participate.

*Expect each staff member to earn their credential as a paraoptometric.* This is a very achievable goal. It will require a few hours of self study and a one time test. Visit [www.aoa.org/education](http://www.aoa.org/education)

*How do I guide staff members to assume responsibility for their actions?*

*Resist the temptation to do everything yourself, even if it would be quicker.* When a staff member comes to you with a question instead of giving the answer, ask "how would you handle this?" or "what do you think would be a good solution?" Wait for their response and encourage them to take action. Even if you don't think it's the best solution. If the action does not negatively impact a patient let the staff member learn by taking action remember it doesn't have to be perfect and it doesn't have to be YOUR way.

*Compliment a job well done.*

*How can I create enthusiasm?*

*Lead by example.* If you're negative, criticizing patients blaming others for situations the staff will follow your lead. Walk in each day with a smile on your face with positive things to say to each staff members, doctors should follow this example too. In staff satisfaction surveys "positive feedback" was the number one motivator, money was number two. A close second but still second.

*What is the best example for a good employee?*

*Your practice image.* Is your office clinical, professional, technological, and family oriented? Those are the guidelines that should drive staff behavior. If you're clinical, professional and technological the staff should be dressed to present that image and should understand the anatomy of the eye and how it works along with function of each instrument and how it impacts the patient. If your practice is family oriented encourage staff to build professional rapport with patients and extend themselves.

All staff members should clearly understand their duties and responsibilities obviously gossiping to unprofessional behavior should result in terminations.

*How do I help others learn the best way to perform all their duties?*

*Demonstrate the perfect example.* The workforce has changed in the last twenty years. Behavior that you may take for granted younger staff members have never learned. Don't become frustrated and angry that a newer staff member can't multi task – show them how to do it. Can you type on the computer, text message and talk on the phone? Younger staff can. But they may lack customer service skills. Explain you would like them to smile as each patient walks in to the office and welcome them. Once they understand the expectation most staff members can achieve it.

*Why to I ask others to give input?*

*Cooperation.* If everyone feels like they have input they are more likely to take responsibility for their actions and take pride in a job well done. If you always tell people what to do you're creating a dependency that does not foster autonomy or staff growth. It may take more time to work this way but in the long run it will be easier to manage a motivated team.

Once you understand your own strengths and weakness you can better identify them in others.

The goal of a good manager is to enable the staff to work independently without day to day guidance or input. This will allow you to focus on the growth of the practice, improvement in patient care and long term staff development. Your role is to keep everything moving in a positive direction.