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## Lessons Learned From the Healthcare Industry

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For HR directors everywhere, recruiting and retaining the best employees is priority one. In the healthcare industry, the need is multiplied tenfold based on a national nursing shortage that has hospitals scrambling to maintain a strong team of nurses. For one HR director at a Denver hospital, the struggle to employ and maintain a top notch nursing staff was constant and provided lessons that can be learned by HR directors everywhere.

In this particular case, the primary challenge the HR director faced was a fiercely competitive healthcare industry, with hospitals jumping at the chance to "steal away" professional nurses who had become the main benefactors of the nation's nursing shortage. To the HR director, it seemed that as soon as he was able to recruit and train a new nurse for his team, another was leaving the hospital for an opportunity elsewhere. He realized he needed to implement a plan that would give him a recruiting edge, while also giving nurses more reason to stay with the hospital once they were brought on board.

His solution came from one of the emerging trends in the healthcare industry: concierge services for nurses. By providing an assistant who takes care of personal chores, such as dry cleaning, shopping, oil changes, postage and mailing, the HR director was able to more easily attract and retain the nurses he needed to complete his team. Additionally, the concierge services saved him and his HR team the time, effort and expense - often amounting to hundreds of thousands of dollars - of recruiting and training new personnel.

The lessons learned by the hospital's HR Director are ones that can be applied to HR directors everywhere. In fact, according to Fortune Magazine, of the 100 "Best Places to Work" in the U.S., one-third of the businesses that made the list provide concierge services to their employees. This trend hasn't been overlooked by the healthcare industry, where more and more hospitals are looking for ways to implement these innovative services, and they shouldn't be overlooked by HR directors in other industries.

The value of incorporating a concierge program as an employee benefit is immense, but before making the decision to hire an outside provider, there are a few important factors to consider:

Bottom line proof

If a company is in the process of interviewing potential providers, they should ask the concierge several questions, including: How much time and money have they saved their clients? While often difficult to determine, what matrixes do they use to track their results? How have their services helped to recruit and retain valuable employees? How do they manage and track their requests? Do they provide customized usage reports? How do they quantify the money and time that the service has saved? How do they staff? What is their staffing philosophy?

### Industry specific

Make sure the concierge company you're considering understands the competitive nature and specific needs of your specific industry. Understand if they will customize the program based on your unique needs and requirements or if they take a cookie cutter approach. A concierge company should take the time to understand your goals and objectives to produce the results that you desire. If a concierge company isn't educated and clear about what will set your hospital apart, the service probably won't meet your expectations.

### Range of services

Some concierge companies only provide a limited range of services. Others will arrange almost anything, including hotels, limousines, professional service referrals, house cleaning, Gallup and JCAHO support, and even help in planning a wedding. So if you're looking for a full-service, never-say-no vendor who can meet almost any need, be sure to clarify that up front. Flexibility is key. Even if they haven't completed a specific request before, they should have the relationships and the resources to get it done.

### On-site office

Some companies are large enough that they require an on-site concierge office. This is a location within the facility where employees can go to make their requests and leave with a smile knowing that their trusted assistant is taking care of them. If a concierge service is able to establish an on-site presence, ask about the quality of their offices. A concierge office should be a welcome port in the storm. The way the office looks, feels, sounds and even smells should be warm and welcoming to your people. You'll want the concierge to portray the best image possible for your organization, and if their office space is cluttered and unprofessional, it can often do more harm than good.

### Web-based request systems

While most concierge companies provide email as a means of making requests, others have developed web-based request management systems. These systems allow hundreds of requests to be processed each month, and provide for the management, tracking and reporting of each and every project that comes into the concierge office.

### References

A good concierge provider should have plenty of outstanding references. Be sure to check with the organizations they already represent - both management and end users. Also, ask if their subcontractors are bonded and insured, and find out what kind of background checks they do on vendors and their own employees.

### Exclusivity

Depending on the competitive nature of your facility, you may want your concierge to be exclusive to your organization. This exclusivity can provide a significant advantage over your competition and it's a powerful differentiator when it comes to employee recruitment and retention. Bear in mind that there's typically a premium associated with exclusivity but, depending on your situation, the cost may be well worth the extra expense.

### Consulting services

Some concierge companies provide consulting services to help you plan a program that best suits your unique needs. Even if they don't implement the concierge program themselves, they can guide you through the process and provide behind the scenes support. In order for concierge services to truly be perceived as a valuable employee benefit, you have to do it right - the first time. Choosing the wrong program or provider can be costly and counter-productive.

### Personal attention

A concierge company should become part of your team. It is critical that they develop a personal understanding of your specific challenges: recruitment, retention vacancy levels, work/life balance. A vendor that simply goes through the motions, without working hard to find the very best solutions, won't be a good fit.

Bottom line: In today's competitive workplace, finding new ways to get and keep good people is critical. A properly implemented concierge program makes the difference in helping your company recruit and retain the very best.

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