

## PRACTICE MANAGER WANTED—MAYBE?

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Are you a "Super Owner?" When it comes to management responsibilities, many practice owners have a management team of "Me, Myself, and I." In other words, "Super Owner," veterinarian by day, practice manager by night, and hospital administrator at the end of the month. Sounds great with the hero background music, but the reality is that there comes the point where you can't do it all, and you need to delegate to relieve some pressure, achieve a healthy work-life balance, and work at the top of your game.

Not sure if the time is right to hire a manager? Ask yourself the following questions:

- Are you overwhelmed with management work after you finish your clinical work to the point that you feel you are always 'at work'?
- Do you spend too much of your day putting out fires – fixing instead of seeing patients?
- Is the business ready to enter the next phase – building an addition, offering new services, or adding more team members?
- What are your strengths...and weaknesses in all the tasks you do each day and night (and weekend)?

If you answered, "yes, yes, maybe, and boy do I hate human resource tasks," you are ready to delegate to a practice manager. The time may not be right for a full-fledged practice manager, but some of your team members could be a good fit for the position with some additional experience. Delegate a "stretch" assignment – a way to give a person more responsibilities and prepare them for future leadership roles. For example, think about lead tech or inventory coordinator roles as a way to stretch someone while removing some duties from your plate. Stretch assignments allow them to test the waters with a few leadership assignments, allowing you to observe them in a leadership role.

Let's assume you are ready to hire a practice manager. Before posting a job ad or promoting someone to the position, determine what the business needs and get your ducks in a row – in other words, know what duties this person will be responsible for.

### Job Description

As Stephen Covey says, "Start with the end result in mind." This will require an assessment of projected practice growth and changes in the organizational chart. Don't have an organizational chart? Now would be the time to set it up and identify who is doing what task and to whom they report. Use the resources at VHMA to consider the differences between the tasks and responsibilities of an Office Manager, Practice Manager, and Hospital Administrator as you map out duties and job descriptions for your practice manager.

Review the list of duties you jotted down for this new role. Do you see tasks where you feel someone else can do better (especially if they have the time and training)? Do you see ones you avoid because you hate doing them (avoid, that is, until it is absolutely necessary to suffer through it)? Are there areas that can help the business operate more efficiently if someone were in charge of overseeing critical tasks? Now you are getting a picture of what your practice manager can do for you.

Knowing what the business needs will help you to write a job description for your practice manager. Don't blindly copy one from an online source - scrutinize every detail because nothing is worse than seeing a job description containing irrelevant duties for your practice manager. Remember that your practice is unique, and some of the duties you need your practice manager to perform will differ from another practice. Use appropriate resources to ensure you don't miss anything and help you expand the role as the business grows.

### Be Strategic About the Specifics

As well as defining the job duties, determine what work schedule is best for the position (considering evening and weekend hours), what tasks can be performed remotely (if any), the qualifications for the position, and the salary range. Remote work? Really? Absolutely. Some things don't need to be done on-site (you may be doing some from home every night right now) or would be done more quickly without all the interruptions that happen during the day. Examples include the schedule, bookkeeping, preparing employee evaluations, and developing a budget. A day or a couple of half days per week working away from the practice can be liberating for your manager and shows that you trust them to use their time wisely. Would the job attract more/better candidates if you allowed some remote work? Your practice, your needs, so you decide.

Regarding qualifications, decide if the tasks are best suited for a certified veterinary practice manager (CVPM), someone certified in human resource management (PHR, SHRM-CP, or SHRM-SCP), or other degrees or management experience. A person without the relevant knowledge or experience may struggle, if not fail. Of course, qualifications require appropriate pay ranges, and there is the elephant in the room – what to pay, and can you afford it?

You can use several resources to benchmark your wages to industry standards. However, questions will remain. Are you comparing apples to apples? Is the pay fair – fair to the practice manager and fair to the business? Depending on your location, your manager candidate may receive an offer from a corporate practice ~ often more than you can afford to pay. Sweeten your offer with intangible benefits like the ability to make a difference for you, your staff, clients and patients. Don't make promises you can't keep, or you will soon find your manager leaving for a better position.

You may have heard that managers *should* be paid 3% of gross revenue. I'm not sure where that rumor started, but it isn't correct. Yes, some managers with excellent people and financial management skills do earn that much. But in most practices, 3% isn't reasonable, sometimes because it's too low. Consider a practice generating \$1 million in fees. 3% of \$1 million is \$30,000, which isn't nearly high enough to buy a talented manager. On the other hand, a practice generating \$10 million in fees will have several people sharing that 3%, or \$300,000. Instead of using a random factoid, use the information published by VHMA to decide what range of pay is appropriate. Then talk to your management advisor or accountant to verify what you can afford.

### Search for the Perfect Fit

Once you have all your ducks in a row, advertise the position and interview candidates. For some, promoting from within is appropriate. For others, hiring from the outside is best. Either way, conduct interviews – yes, interview the in-house candidates too.

In contrast to tech/nurse or customer service positions, you may not have much experience interviewing managers. The process of developing interview questions is the same – start with basic questions, then dig into qualifications, skills, and experience. Speaking of experience, consider the candidates' behavior when applying for the position and communicating with you during the interviewing process.

Most candidates today aren't mailing a typed resume on fancy stationery. Instead, they fill out information on their smartphones. They lose interest if you don't respond quickly and will move on to other job opportunities if the process takes too long. Streamline your process, communicate with the candidates via text messages, and inform them of the timeline for scheduling an interview or confirming whether the job is theirs. Don't risk being left high and dry when you finally get around to deciding who to hire, only to find out they have taken another job.

Don't fly by the seat of your pants when it come to practice management. So instead, work with a consultant and accountant to formulate a management strategy that anticipates business changes and growth, ensures efficient performance of tasks, and provides equitable compensation. This way, when the time is right, you have done the preliminary work and can more quickly get to onboarding your practice manager. Doing so will increase the chances of better business performance and work-life balance for you AND your manager.