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The keys to training new employees inexpensively are planning, organization, and maximizing existing resources. But it can be tempting to skimp on training. After all, training is costly, isn’t it? It takes up valuable resources and gums up the normal practice flow. Sparing the time to train a newbie feels like a luxury you can’t afford. So you school your new employee on the fly and hope for the best.

Such tight-fisted training policies can cost you big, in the long run -- a half-trained employee tends to operate with half-speed efficiency. Still, you can’t afford to halt the workings of your practice for a week or two just because someone new has signed on.

Consider a middle-of-the-road approach to bring your new employee on board quickly, with an eye on long-term success. Specifically:

**Train onsite:**

- **Create a written training manual**, applicable to all new employees. This overall plan should also include job-specific guidelines. Also make sure you have sections denoting standard practice policies and “Frequently Asked Questions.”

- **Assign an existing staff person as “training coordinator,”** whose main job is to allocate training tasks so no employee gets overloaded. The training coordinator will structure time with existing staff members to orient the new employee to your computer system, workflow, and administrative protocols, and also to observe their roles within the practice. Set target completion dates for each training task.

- **Make use of existing resources as training content** for new employees. These might include brochures, videos, pre-and postoperative information sheets, and content residing on your practice’s Web site (clinical offerings, physician CVs, etc.). Also, utilize recent issues of any newsletters, magazines, and journals to which your practice subscribes to shore up what your practice has to offer clinically.

**Train offsite:**

- **Set up “field trips” to hospitals and surgery centers to meet key personnel.** Also, consider requiring new staff members to shadow the physician and observe five patient visits -- training by immersion, if you will.

- **Coordinate off-site training resources.** Classroom-type seminars and workshops offer face-to-face interaction and role-playing, as well as networking opportunities for staffers. Many classroom events are worth the extra money and time, and many of them also offer discount opportunities. Technology training works well offsite. It’s critical that a new staff member receives formal training on your software -- and any other Web-based products you use -- within six months of joining your practice. Always check to see if ongoing training is included in the initial service fee or if discounts are available. Register new employees and existing staff for any available continuing education courses.

- **Take advantage of membership discounts for training classes.** Most sponsoring or hosting organizations offer lower registration prices to members. The MGMA offers membership discounts in addition to a $100 early registration discount and group discounts.
of $100 per additional attendee. (Of course, Karen Zupko & Associates offers a 10 percent discount for groups of three or more to most coding workshops sponsored or cosponsored by KZA.)

Train online:

- **Use webinars and audioconferences.** According to e-learning gurus like William Horton and Brandon Hallo, Web-based training can cut training costs by as much as 60 percent and training time by 50 percent.

- **In many cases, effective Web-based courses are available for smaller registration fees** than off-site conferences, courses, and workshops which can cost a substantial amount of money. Audioconferences such as those hosted regularly by the *Journal of Medical Practice Management* are another good option, allowing the entire staff to listen and ask questions for one relatively low fee.

- **One reason for ongoing staff training** is to ensure that they maintain their professional credentials. It’s important to look for courses that are run, or approved, by a certifying organization.

- **Both Web-based and audio courses are available** through the Medical Group Management Association (MGMA) for managers and administrators; through the American Academy of Professional Coders (AAPC) for coders; and through the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) for coding, medical records, and HIPAA compliance. For physician assistants, the American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA) includes a number of online programs in its continuing education courses.

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**Disclosures:**

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