

Hiring & Retaining the Right Staff

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I. Introduction

In today's health care environment, Environmental Services Leaders must find new and creative ways to attract, hire, and retain great employees. It becomes an even greater challenge when opening a new facility, which may require hiring 100 or more employees. Also, you may be competing with neighboring hospitals trying to attract the same employee pool.

With a focus on customer service and improving the patient experience, it is essential to hire people who are a good fit to your hospital during recruiting, hiring, and onboarding processes. The purpose of this paper is to provide you with proven strategies in attracting, interviewing, hiring and retaining staff.

II. Recruiting Strategies

In today's competitive market where Environmental Services Directors and Managers are trying to hire Environmental Services employees, the Environmental Services Leader is up against some stiff competition, but this competition may also prove to be a valuable resource when searching for potential new employees. The following community entities are resources to consider:

1. Other Hospitals & Health Care Facilities (within the geographic area) - although hospitals and health care facilities in your immediate vicinity compete for the same employees, I still recommend that you send their

Environmental Services Director or Manager a copy of your job announcements. The reason being that neighboring hospitals could:

- a. Be in the middle of a hiring freeze or lay-off.
 - b. Have on-call or part time employees who are looking for full time employment, more hours, or another job to supplement their current job.
2. Long Term Care Facilities & Assisted Living Facilities - skills are similar and transferable between Environmental Services Technicians who work in a health care facility or a long term care facility; sometimes referred to as a nursing home.
 3. Hotels & Resorts - although hotels are not under the same regulatory requirements of a hospital, their staff are usually trained in cleaning techniques, equipment operations, and the safe and effective use of cleaning chemicals/solutions. Top notch hotels have high standards for the cleanliness and orderliness of their guest rooms, so the training hotel Environmental Services Technicians receive would be of value to hospital based Environmental Services Department.
 4. Universities & Colleges - college students can always use a part time job to offset their college and living expenses. Several years ago, I had the opportunity to manage the Environmental Services Department in a private hospital in Lincoln, Nebraska, only a few miles away from the University of Nebraska. Most of my evening and weekend staff were college students from the local university. I found most of the students to be very bright, hardworking, and reliable. The only staffing challenges I had with this group of employees was during breaks (holidays, spring, and summer recess), and when they had to prepare for exams. The key here is to understand their needs and your department's needs before you offer

them a position.

5. Professional Association Job Boards- professional associations such as the Association for the Health Care Environment ⁽³⁾ (AHE) have job boards where employers can post positions for Environmental Services management positions. AHE Job Board is [AHE Career Link](#).
6. Mega Church ⁽¹⁾ Job Boards- some mega churches (2,000 or more members) have job boards available for posting job openings.

In the competitive employment market of today, some variables that should be considered include:

1. Are you a Union Shop? Hospitals with unionized employees generally tend to provide better wages, better benefits, and more job protection than non-union hospitals. In some states, many hospitals' Environmental Services staff is in a union, so you may find the salaries pretty much aligned.
2. Does your organization offer an attractive benefits package? In some cases, the benefits package (vacation, sick leave, medical insurance, dental insurance, optical insurance, disability insurance, retirement plans, legal services, other) could be worth up to 50 percent of the employee's annual salary.
3. Who is your competition? Hospitals, Long Term Care Facilities, Hotels, Assisted Living Facilities, and other Retirement Communities all compete for the same employees.
4. Are neighboring hospitals building new facilities or wing additions? A new hospital or addition brings excitement to any community with the prospect of new jobs, which improves the standard of living for many families.

Although this may be good news for the local community, hiring managers usually struggle with attracting applicants, and filling newly created positions. Reasons why this could be a challenge are:

- a. A shrinking pool of available applicants
- b. The hospital location might present some transportation challenges getting to work
- c. A low rate of unemployment
- d. A resort town with numerous hotels and attractions that employ service workers

5. What is your hospital's reputation? Does the Joint Commission accredit your hospital? Is your hospital Nurse Magnet designated? Where does your hospital rank on the annual report of *U.S. News & World Report's* Best Hospitals? This may not be a consideration for your hourly staff, but when recruiting management staff, some applicants may consider a hospital's reputation.

III. Interviewing Strategies

Prior to you receiving resumes from potential candidates, I would recommend that you have your recruiter pre-screen applicants based on agreed criteria, before the resumes are e-mailed to you for consideration. A phone screening will allow the recruiter to ask specific questions based on the job posting requirements, and he or she can provide you with an objective opinion on whether the applicant meets the job requirements, and if the applicant would be a good fit for your department. At this point, you can decide which applicants to schedule for interviews.

- A. Hiring Hourly Staff**- when you are attempting to hire hourly staff (Environmental Service Technicians, Linen Services Personnel, Office Staff, Dispatchers, and Leads), you should have a well thought out plan for your interviews. You should work closely with your Human Resources

Department to develop a game plan for recruiting staff. Human Resources may also be able to assist you with creating relevant interview questions.

Questions that you should answer include:

1. How many applicants do I need to interview to fill this position?
2. Should I conduct the interview, or assign it to someone else?
3. Will the interview be a panel representative of the candidate's supervisor, peers, and customers?
4. How long should each interview last?
5. Will my Recruiter pre-screen applicants by phone before I see the resumes?

Double Tree Hotels ⁽²⁾ interviews high performers currently doing the job. You want to find out what makes them so good at their jobs – the “attributes” or “competencies” you want to interview for. Interview employees that managers identify as A-Players within their department. Information obtained offers managers a great deal of insight into the nature of the work and the reasons for high turnover, if it exists.

Concerning the number of applicants to interview, I would recommend that you interview several applicants for each position. Out of the candidates interviewed, some may decline a job offer, some might not meet your job requirements and would not be offered a job by you, and you would possibly have a few extra candidates for future positions, or that you could contact should the candidate hire not work out.

Usually, ES Directors do not need to be a part of the interview for hourly employees. Once the interview has been held, the interviewer, or interview panel will score each candidate, and provide their overall scores and hire recommendations to the Director. At that time, the Director may elect to hold a second interview to meet the candidate, and to ask the candidate a few more questions to ensure that the candidate is a good fit for the department. On conducting the interview, I would recommend that the supervisor and the manager who this position reports to conduct interviews for Environmental Services Technicians, ES Leads, Linen Services Staff, and Dispatchers. In some cases, you may elect to add a peer (ES technician, as an example) to the interview panel.

Concerning the length of time allowed for each interview for front line staff, I would recommend no more than 45 minutes per candidate, including the interview and scoring. You should have only questions which are pertinent to the job, and not of a personal nature. In the past, questions were strictly about the tasks to be performed, and about attendance and attitude. With a focus on the patient experience, some questions should be about customer service and communications skills. Below are some sample questions, but the questions should be tailored to your facility, and to the jobs you are trying to fill:

1. Describe your experience in the Environmental Services Department.
2. Describe how you would properly daily clean a patient room.
3. Explain proper waste management procedures, including bio-hazardous waste handling.
4. Describe high touch items you would clean in a patient room.

5. Give an example of a situation where you were asked to do several different urgent tasks. What did you do?
6. Give an example of a time when you provided excellent customer service or service recovery.
7. Give me an example of a time when you went above and beyond your employer's job expectations in order to get a job done.
8. How do you define teamwork?
9. Describe what great customer service means to you.
10. Do you know what AIDET means and how it would be applied?
11. Please share your knowledge of cleaning chemicals.
12. Please describe your knowledge of computer programs.

B. Hiring Supervisors and Managers: The Environmental Services Director should organize an interview panel or panels. Potential panelists could include: ES Director/Assistant Director, ES Manager, ES Supervisor, ES Lead, ES Aide, Nurse Manager, Facilities Director, Safety Officer, and/or Director of Infection Control. The interview should last no more than 45 minutes, with additional time to discuss and score the questions, and prepare for the next candidate.

Here are sample interview questions I found to be useful when interviewing candidates for a management position:

1. The Environmental Services Director/Manager has responsibility for providing overall direction to supervisors and staff to ensure that:

- a) All customers are pleased with the services provided.
- b) All assigned buildings and areas are clean, sanitary, and aesthetically pleasing to our patients, visitors, and staff.
- c) A comprehensive Training Program is in place to ensure compliance with Medical Center Policy, and Regulatory Requirements.
- d) A robust recycling and waste reduction program is in place at all locations.

What qualifies you to do this job?

- 2. What do you see as the key challenges of the position?
- 3. What would you want to accomplish within your first six months?
- 4. Please share your knowledge of regulatory and accreditation agencies that health care facilities must comply with (answer: Magnet, CMS, TJC, OSHA, EPA, DOT, City & County Health Departments, Fire Marshall, Water Dept.)
- 5. Please share your knowledge of AIDET and HCAHPS. What measures have you taken to improve HCAHPS scores in your department?
- 6. Who are your Customers?
 - a) How would you structure your day to ensure a high level of Customer Satisfaction?
 - b) What tools do you use to measure Customer Satisfaction?
 - c) You will be required to develop training programs, and use a variety of and software programs in this position.
 - d) What is your experience in developing and conducting formal and informal training to staff, leads, and supervisors?
 - e) What software programs are you experienced with using?

III. Background and Reference Checks

After you have selected the employee(s) you wish to offer employment to, it is important to work with your Human Resources Department concerning any background checks or testing requirements. Most health care organizations require background and criminal record checks, and may also do a credit check. Hospitals also may require some type of drug testing.

Concerning reference checks, it is always wise to check on the work history of the candidate you are considering hiring. Keep in mind that Human Resources Departments may only give out certain information, such as dates of employment, reason for leaving, eligible for rehire, and hourly wage at termination. Some Human Resources Departments utilize an electronic questionnaire that is sent via e-mail to the candidate's employer references. These reference checks ask more specific questions, which ask about performance, behaviors, and attendance.

IV. Clear Job Expectations

In order to ensure a new employee's success, and to ensure that you are hiring the right person, before making them an offer, you should review the job position and job duties list with them to ensure that they understand what will be expected from them once they start work. If there is no conflict out of this discussion with the candidate, you would proceed to make a job offer, and to discuss a start date.

V. New Employee Orientation and Initial Competencies

Once your new employee accepts the job offer, it is important to send him or her to New Employee Orientation- known as NEO. At NEO, the new employee may learn about the organization's history, culture, mission, vision, and values. Other topics covered could include safety, infection control, personnel policies, payroll information, benefits, and other employee perks. Your employee would also have

an opportunity to meet key leaders, including the CEO. After NEO, the employee would participate in the ES Department specific orientation program to learn about the department’s policies and procedures, view many documents and video training, and then shadow more experienced employees to learn the many tasks our Environmental Services Staff perform. A tool used during the initial department orientation is the employee Initial Competency Review Form. This form allows the employee and the employee’s supervisor to document that the initial hire training has been successfully completed. The original document is usually placed in the employee’s Personnel File located in the ES Office. A copy can be provided to the employee upon their request.

VI. Rewards & Recognition

Now that you have recruited, hired, and trained your new employee, besides holding them accountable for cleaning thousands of items and square footage, you have to continually provide leadership, guidance, and support so they will be successful. You also need to provide perks along the way so they feel valued. The following is a table providing some things you can do to reward and recognize your staff.

REWARDS & RECOGNITION IDEAS- Table

WAYS TO REWARD YOUR STAFF	WAYS TO RECOGNIZE YOUR STAFF
Environmental Services Professionals Week Celebrations	Birthday Cards, Get Well Cards, Sympathy Cards, and flowers
Gift Cards for participation at staff meetings- reading, role playing	Thank You Cards personally handed to the employee, or mailed to their home
Gift Cards for working safely or making safety suggestions	Acknowledge Anniversaries at Staff Meetings

Perfect Attendance Gift Cards/Certificates	Speak with them every day
Free Uniforms Coats, Hats, & Work Shoes	Create a Department Newsletter recognizing new hires, promotions, retirements, births, and compliments
Quarterly Lunches with the ES Director & her/his boss for top performers	Employee of the Month Poster Board
Holiday Potlucks	Administrative Professionals Day Lunch, Flowers, and Gift

VII. Succession Planning

Succession Planning is developing your staff so they are trained, coached, and mentored to take on a greater job than they are currently in. It could be an ES Manager mentoring and training a supervisor, so that at some point in the future, the supervisor could be promoted to a manager's position. With Succession Planning, you are preparing someone to take your place should a greater job opportunity develop for you inside or outside of your company, or if you are looking at retiring. In Succession Planning, the key is to have a plan, share your knowledge, and spend time with the person you are mentoring.

VIII. Concluding Thoughts...

I have used the strategies discussed in this article to successfully recruit new employees to the ranks of Environmental Service Departments I have managed over the past 36 years. In the Health care Environmental Services field, we typically have the largest number of employees next to Nursing. With such large

numbers, we will always be looking to hire new employees to fill job vacancies. The key to a great employee is ensuring that you have an orderly, comprehensive, and professional process to attract, hire, develop, and retain the best staff. Working closely with your Human Resources Recruiter will provide you with support in hiring staff. Also, your peers who manage Environmental Service Departments are a tremendous resource, so reach out to them!

References:

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