Think outside the box when recruiting new hires
By Mary Dunn, CPOT

The task of recruiting possible candidates to interview for a staff opening may seem easy enough; post an ad in the local newspaper and see who applies. But current trends indicate there may be more options to consider that may assist with this task and ensure better results.

SOURCE OF NEW HIRES
- Candidate initiated
- Newspaper ads
- Internet listings
- Referrals

Which of these sources do you think, according to a recent survey conducted by Management & Business Academy, is the most used source to find a new hire?

The Management & Business Academy survey reported that in 2008, 39 percent of new hires came from referrals, and 25 percent from newspaper ads. In May of 2013, it was reported that 38 percent came from referrals, and 35 percent from Internet listings. Newspaper ads dropped to only 10 percent signifying a shift in how potential candidates are found.

It was also found in the survey results that “referrals are somewhat more of an important source of new hires for smaller practices. The largest numbers of referrals that produce new hires come from current staff members.”

As trends change the way we find new hires, our practice in Maine has adopted another new approach for locating potential candidates and training them. The first item on the agenda was for management to take a fresh look at how they perceived the job opening. They posed the question, is this an opportunity for a job, or is it the entry point for a career? Once determined this was the beginning of a career, management quickly viewed the opening with a whole new mindset. Shifting their mindset lead them to establish a “Paraoptometric Internship Program” for the entry level position. This would provide an opportunity for someone to go to “school” in your office and pay them for it.
A simple **Overview of the Paraoptometric Internship Program** consists of:

1. A three to six month work-study and “on the job” training program
2. Opportunity for permanent employment after six months
3. Intern compensation: 30 hours per week - $8.50 per hour (for the internship period only)
4. National certification with the Commission on Paraoptometric Certification (CPC) after six months
5. A career with advancement opportunities

The practice would pay for:

- Education materials used in training
- Education materials for certification preparation
- CPC certified paraoptometric (CPO) certification examination fee
- Membership in the American Optometric Association Paraoptometric Section utilizing online training opportunities available to members

At the end of the Internship a salary adjustment was offered that reflected their new level of education and certification.

**SOURCE OF INTERNS**

Our practice contacted high school guidance counselors, career centers, physician’s offices, and unemployment agencies to refer candidates to our office. Guidance counselors looked for students that had high aptitudes in math and science and wanted to pursue some type of medical profession. Many students cannot afford to pay for a college education, and the internship program provided a way to work in a medical environment.

Be very specific about the requirements and expectations for the internship program in the information you provide to those referring candidates to your office. Candidates should have a clear understanding of the timeline for the internship program, what the practice will provide, and what is expected of them.
The following is an example of the type of information to provide to those making referrals:

Paraoptometric Internship
Optical Assistant/Optician for Optometric Office

The __________________________ (name of practice) is seeking to find a candidate for its Paraoptometric Internship Program. If you have a high school diploma, an interest in medical sciences with good math skills, a desire to help people in a medical setting and motivation to learn a hands-on profession, consider applying for this program.

Include the Paraoptometric Internship Program Summary (see “Overview of the Paraoptometric Internship Program” above)

Application Details

Required Information to submit for consideration:
- Letter of interest
- Resume
- Three letters of recommendation

For more detailed information, please e-mail: Attn: ____________________________

NARROWING THE FIELD OF CANDIDATES

1. **Review their resume** - narrow the number of potential candidates for the program down to just a few based on their resume. Conduct phone interviews with the top three candidates you have chosen. Make sure all the applicants understand they are competing for a position in this program. Candidates should have a clear understanding of how an internship program works, so they are not discouraged by the initial internship salary scale. An easy explanation of an internship is that the practice serves as an education institution where they do not have to pay to get work experience and gain valuable knowledge. The practice will be paying for them to learn. An increase in salary will be re-visited at the completion of the internship timeframe.

2. **Pre-assessments** - it is very beneficial to assess each candidate’s verbal and math skills, and their customer service aptitude and mechanical aptitude. You can administer these types of tests yourself, or through an employment assessment agency. The first two tests should be given to the applicants prior to the first interview. Those candidates that show promise should be contacted for a second interview.
Communicate to them beforehand that on the second interview they will be trained on a few easy tasks to determine their mechanical aptitude. After the brief training session, they will be tested on how much they had retained. You may want to explain that you are not expecting them to retain everything from the training session, but want to evaluate how much they did retain.

Examples of exercises for the mechanical aptitude test are:

- Typing a short referral letter
- Scribing a short chief complaint
- Lensometry – show them the basics and give them two lenses, one spherical and one spherocylindrical
- Have them remove and insert two lenses in a zyl frame
- Have them assemble and disassembled a pair of eyewear and use another pair of eyewear to have them insert a lens into a rimless frame

Provide clear instructions on the tasks to perform with a set amount of time to perform them. These “hands-on” tests are critical in choosing a good match for your practice. You may get candidates who do well on the assessment tests and struggle with the "hands on" tests and vice versa. It's the overall combination of the two and the feeling you get from them that will determine your choice.

**GETTING THE INTERN STARTED**

Once you have selected your intern, start them on a very clear roadmap of training. Begin by registering them with the American Optometric Association (AOA) as a Paraoptometric at [PS@aoa.org](mailto:PS@aoa.org). Use the free resources available on the AOA Paraoptometric Section Education Services website such as the Paraoptometric Skill Builder® Beginner Level 1 online training program. Additional resources which are available for purchase are critical to the success of this internship program.

The first month:

1. Shadow an experienced staff paraoptometric in the first area you would like them trained in
2. Give them some of the CPO Study Flash Cards that pertain to the area they are learning
3. Have them begin the Paraoptometric Skill Builder® Beginner Level 1 and take the tests that are at the end of each unit
4. Choose suitable articles from the Online Continuing Education Program and Archived Articles provided
At the end of the month, review with the intern the programs they have participated in. Talk with them about what is working and what may not be working. Discuss what can be added or scaled back. Adjust the program as you go according to their progress and retention.

Each month continue to add units from the Paraoptometric Skill Builder®, flash cards, and educational modules with tests. Don't be afraid to have them repeat any of the online continuing education programs. In the third month have them start the CPO Study Guide. Reviewing at the end of each month their progress or issues. Use feedback from office staff as to their impression of the intern and what they believe may help the process.

After the third month, you should evaluate the intern. Encourage them to be honest about the process and let them know you want their feedback, just as you are providing feedback to them. Keep in mind not all of the areas listed may have been completed. At this point, you need to determine whether or not it is in the best interest of the practice to continue with their involvement in the program. As with any individual who is not performing at the level of performance your practice expects, you may need to discontinue their internship. You will know by the end of the third month whether they are motivated enough to continue or not.

At six months, they should be ready to sit for the CPO certification examination. At this point they should be a viable addition to your health care team, and feel invested in the success of the practice. Once certified, it is time to evaluate their salary to correspond with their achievement and offer them permanent employment. With the investment of their time and energy, this intern turned CPO is not likely to leave anytime soon.

Following the roadmap for learning outlined in this article may lead to better hiring outcomes.

Whether you “found” your new staff person through a referral by a local agency or current staff person, an internship program may be something to consider when faced with filling an open, entry-level position.

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Ms. Dunn is the past recipient of the Paraoptometric of the Year Award for Maine, New England, and American Optometric Association Paraoptometric Section.

References:
Management & Business Academy : MBA Survey: Staff Management – May 2013

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Think Outside the Box When Recruiting New Hires

To receive one hour of continuing education credit, those taking the quiz must be AOA Associate members and answer seven of the 10 questions correctly. This exam consists of multiple-choice questions designed to measure the level of understanding of the material covered in the continuing education article “Think Outside the Box when Recruiting New Hires.”

This article is worth one hour of continuing education credit from the Commission on Paraoptometric Certification. Expiration date: Dec. 31st of this year

To receive continuing education credit, complete the information below and mail with your $10 processing fee, $10 per hour of CE before Dec. 31st of this year to the: 
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Select the option that best answers the question.

1. According to the article, what are two tools to use to narrow the field of candidates to interview?
   a. Phone interviews and professional references
   b. Employee recommendations and past employer comments
   c. Review resumes and pre-assessments
   d. Surveys and self-assessments

2. According to the Management & Business Academy survey, what is the most-used source to find a new hire?
   a. Newspaper advertisements
   b. Career centers
   c. Referrals
   d. Internet listings
3. All of the following are components of the described Internship Program except:
   a. National Certification with the CPC after six months
   b. Permanent employment at the start of the program
   c. Intern Compensation
   d. Three- to six-month work study

4. According to the MBA Survey, how much did newspaper ad recruitment decrease from 2008 to 2013?
   a. 15 percent
   b. 3 percent
   c. 10 percent
   d. 25 percent

5. Look for applicants with high aptitudes in:
   a. Customer service and math
   b. Math and science
   c. Science and customer service
   d. Social and computer skills

6. The following skills should be assessed for the position except:
   a. Verbal skills
   b. Graphic design skills
   c. Mechanical aptitude
   d. Customer service skills

7. At what point in the six-month Internship Program is it recommended that you evaluate the intern’s performance?
   a. Monthly
   b. After the first week
   c. At the end of the third month
   d. Wait until the end of the full six months then provide feedback
8. According to the 2013 MBA Survey, larger practices found the largest number of referrals came from:
   a. Internet listings
   b. Newspaper ads
   c. Candidate initiated
   d. Current staff members

9. In order to be eligible for the internship program, one must possess a minimum of a:
   a. Two-year degree
   b. Four-year degree
   c. High school diploma
   d. No education requirement is required, just a desire to learn and receive “hands-on” training

10. According to the “roadmap” for learning, at the end of the sixth month the intern should be ready to:
    a. Perform pre-testing
    b. Sit for the CPO certification examination
    c. Fit contact lenses
    d. File insurance claims