

Advancement Opportunities for Clinical Professionals

Practical Strategies for Clinical Staff Retention

Financial & Policy Recommendation			
Create a \$250,000 annual education stipend per agency for clinicians seeking advancement opportunities, including developing a leadership program within the organization. Maximum \$30,000 per employee over 3 years.			
Legislation	Dollars Per Agency	Annual Cost	Total Cost (3 yrs.)
No	\$250,000	\$5,750,000	\$17,250,000

Introduction

Clinical professionals like social workers and counselors seek advancement opportunities throughout the course of their career. Driving factors include exploring new professional interests, refining skills and expertise, increasing income, and preventing boredom and complacency. When clinicians are provided the opportunity to advance, they provide better services and affect positive transformational change to the organization and the behavioral health system at large.

According to a 2014 Gallup poll, only 30% of U.S. employees are engaged at work.ⁱ When managers fail to recognize their employees’ desire for advancement, they miss opportunities to activate growth potential for the employee and the organization. Companies sometimes wrongly believe that the answer to engaging and retaining good clinicians is to promote them to a managerial role. When asked how employees came into their managerial position, the top reason was “I was successful in a previous non-managerial role.”ⁱⁱ According to another survey, only 1 in 10 people possess the unique combination of talent and passion to manage, and just two more can develop this talent with coaching.ⁱⁱⁱ

Advancement does not always require a promotion into management, nor is it the best career pathway for everyone. Non-management career pathways can help organizations develop and retain quality clinical professionals.

Non-Management Pathways to Advancement



Improve Educational Foundation—Encourage clinicians to invest in gaining new knowledge and skills that benefit both their career and the company. Higher education (e.g., Master’s Degree), certifications (e.g., Certified Advanced Alcohol and Drug Counselor (CAADC) or Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing EMDR), and continuing education (e.g. Coursera or master classes) all provide these opportunities to expand one’s knowledge base . Tuition reimbursement or a salary increase should be awarded for achievement of new credentials and certifications, especially those that expand billing and clientele opportunities.



Promote Internal Positions— Internal hiring is six times more effective than all other sources of hiring.^{iv} Strategically reallocate your employees within your company instead of losing them to competitors. Advertise open positions to current employees on the company intranet and through e-mail. If an internal candidate is not chosen for a position, explain the rationale, and offer to collaboratively create a plan for addressing any skill or knowledge deficits. Encourage employees to be transparent about their career explorations with their manager, and for managers to collaborate with one another when an employee changes positions.



Delegate Special Projects—Research shows that when an employee participates in a special project and excels, they are 78% more likely to believe that their job is preparing them for their future career.^v Special projects could include participating in a workgroup, developing a psychosocial curriculum, assisting with an audit, consulting on a process, creating resource guides, or marketing your services to the community.



Create Trainers, Leads, and Mentors—Educating and supporting new staff aids in employee satisfaction and retention. Leverage good clinicians as facilitators of new employee trainings (e.g., Mental Illness 101, Crisis Management, Trauma Informed Care, Self-Care) and in-services (e.g., serving those with self-injurious behaviors, utilizing a sensory room, Cognitive behavioral skills). Give established, skilled clinicians opportunities to mentor new clinicians and own aspects of your internship program.



Offer Leadership Training—Create an internal certification pathway for clinicians (And other disciplines alike) to enhance their leadership skills. Utilize your workforce development department to offer monthly trainings on core leadership skills such as communication, emotional intelligence, organization, problem-solving, strategic thinking, and motivation. Require that 90% of courses be completed to receive the leadership certificate.

Next Steps

Assess

Assess to what extent CMHCs are already providing non-management advancement opportunities to their clinicians. This can be done by asking Readiness Assessment questions about clinicians:

- *What advancement opportunities are they seeking?*
- *What advancement opportunities are available?*
- *How are advancement opportunities advertised?*
- *Why do clinicians leave?*

Promote

Promote the available advancement opportunities among your managers. Ensure they are aware of what is available and what benefit sharing these opportunities with their employees holds. This can be done through:

- *Discussing tuition reimbursement, salary increases for advanced certifications, and leadership training opportunities at leadership meetings*
- *Sending an open jobs e-mail at least monthly*

Engage

Expect managers to engage their clinical teams in creating a vision for their career, defining their career goals, and understanding their options within the company. Have them target the opportunities available to the employee's particular motivating factors for advancement, such as:

- *Increasing salary*
- *Refining skills and expertise*
- *Exploring professional interests*
- *Preventing boredom*

ⁱ Beck, R.J. & Harter, J. (2014) Why Great Managers are so Rare. Gallup Business Journal. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/231593/why-great-managers-rare.aspx>

ⁱⁱ Parr, A. (2017). 82% of Your Managers aren't Effective at their Job. LinkedIn. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/82-your-managers-arent-effective-job-alissa-parr>

ⁱⁱⁱ Beck, R.J. & Harter, J. Why Great Managers are so Rare.

^{iv} O.C. Tanner Institute. (2019). "Employee & Business Success," Global Culture Report. <https://www.octanner.com/global-culture-report/2019/success.html>

^v "2017 Recruiting Funnel Benchmark Report," Jobvite, 2017: https://www.jobvite.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Jobvite_2017_Recruiting_Funnel_Benchmark_Report.pdf