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Hi, it's Dr. Weitz. Thanks so much for joining me for this episode of the private medical practice academy. You need to hire someone for your front desk, but before you sit down to write the ad for that position, you first need to understand what it is that you want that front office person to do. If you're starting out, you're probably thinking to yourself, everything stop right there. That's not a real answer. I'm sure you've heard me say a zillion times. You need to understand your flow and establish a process for everything. Nowhere is this more true than your front desk, but before we even get to that point, we need to understand the importance of your front office.

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The first impression that people have of you is their experience. When they walk in your front door, does the person at the front desk acknowledge the patient immediately? Are they greeted with a smile or is your front desk person busy playing candy crush on their phone? More likely than not the person who's at your front desk is the first person in your office that anyone is going to meet. That person basically represents you. So aside from simply listing a set of responsibilities, you're going to want to think about who you're hiring through the prism of who you are and what your practice is about. And then also, what are the demographics of your patient population today?

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I want to talk to you about the most fundamental skill you're going to want your front desk staff to have. And before you start thinking of all of the tasks that need to be done, let me stop you here. By far, the most important skill is communication aside from the fact that great communication skills are the backbone to professionalism and excellent customer service. It's probably the hardest one to actually teach. I'll tell you that in my experience, this is something that people either get, or they don't for these reasons, regardless of the exhausted list of tasks and responsibilities that you're going to want to assign to your front office staff.

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Absolutely none of their skills is going to be more important than their ability to communicate. Now that I've said that let's start with the obvious. You want to hire someone whose appearance is professional. Personally, I'm a big fan of office uniforms because it takes the entire, what should I wear or in other words, is this okay out of getting dressed every morning, having an office uniform policy simplifies the decision-making and increases the likelihood of that professional appearance on some level, this is actually the easy part because it's something that you can write a policy for more difficult to control is hygiene and appearance.

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Now you may think that this is obnoxious or prejudice and absolutely obvious, but don't hire anyone who smells like they haven't showered or whose breath stinks. This is actually one of the reasons that you really want to have an in-person interview and simply doing it over zoom. Doesn't cut it in another reason that you'll want an in-person interview is to be able to assess someone's nonverbal skills and want to stop here and

say that patient satisfaction is all about the connection about trust and about forming relationships. One of the things that you can truly have an impact on is the relationship component. When you're an employed physician, as part of a large group or a hospital system, the only thing you have control over is yourself.

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On the other hand, in private practice, you have complete control over your staff patients, just like any other customer don't want to feel like they are a transaction. When you're interviewing potential staff, especially for your front desk. I want you to think about, are they easy to connect with? And that connection is all about communication, but let's be clear. Communication is so much more than simply what comes out of someone's mouth. So what's more important than words, body, language, and tone. As for body language. Does the person smile when you greet them? Do they shake your hand with a firm handshake or is it a wet noodle?

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Are they dynamic and engaged? Do they seem relaxed with you even before they say the first word they've given off a vibe, you're going to want to think about this as you're interviewing people. Now, you really want to be able to learn how to read people's body language. I'll give you a very personal example. I apparently have a look that I give when I'm disappointed in you that screams, are you kidding me? Or are you just that dumb? I wasn't even aware of it until my kids told me that I had it. And then when I asked my staff, whether it was true, they sheepishly told me yes, and everybody knows it.

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Why am I telling you this? It's because body language speaks volumes. You don't actually have to say anything. And yet everybody knows, right? So you want to really assess this when you are interviewing somebody for that front desk position, similarly tone can have a tremendous impact on someone's impression. I'm sure you've heard. It's not what you say, but how you say it. At some point, you've probably walked into an office and had the person who was supposed to greet you, not look up or say to you in this annoyed tone. Oh, can I help you as if they have better things to do?

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If this has happened to you, I'm sure that you were turned off and probably didn't even hear what the person actually had to say to you because you were already so annoyed. Whether your patients trust you, the physician starts with your staff.

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And needless to say, this starts at the front desk. Every message has to have both content and feeling. I want you to remember that the message we send. Isn't always the message that's received. Why does this happen? Usually because there's a disconnect between the content and the feeling that's conveyed, and those nonverbal clues are more believable than the verbal ones. Now, there are multiple things that go into

barriers in communication. These include physical perceptual, emotional educational, cultural language, and gender differences.

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This is where really understanding the demographics of your practice. So important. For example, if you're a pediatrician and the person at your front desk, doesn't tolerate screaming, kids, you have a problem. Your front desk staff has to handle all sorts of issues. You need to make sure that you identify and eliminate any of the obvious barriers that are going to interfere with their ability to handle things. So I want to talk about some of those issues. Let's start with the patient who shows up late for their appointment and demands to be seen, or the patient who's angry that they haven't been called back to an exam room yet your front staff has to be able to deescalate these situations when you're running significantly behind the patients in the waiting room deserve to be told how far behind you are and potentially offered the opportunity to reschedule guess who has to convey this message, your front desk staff.

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And while we can talk about what they need to say, it's much harder to control how they say it. If your staff acts annoyed, angry, or impatient, you get the idea. This is not going to go over well. Patient satisfaction and retention is directly related to their interaction with your staff. Patient trust stems from confidence in your staff's competence and communication skills. So what are the key components needed for great communication? Well, they include active listening, empathy, confidence, friendliness, respect, responsiveness, and the ability to adapt that communication style to the audience that they are talking to.

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Let's dissect this into things that you can actually train people to do, and the skills that they inherently need to have. You can empower your staff and give them confidence by developing processes. For example, if you have a specific check-in process, that's clearly written out step by step, then your staff doesn't have to guess what the policy is for that patient who shows up late or who refuses to pay their copay. I strongly advise you to have a written script for the most common scenarios that your staff is going to encounter. You really don't want your staff freelancing their responses without a script. All bets are off in terms of consistency. What

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Happens at that check-in window? And if your staff is unsure about what to say, then they're not going to appear confident or competent aside from patient satisfaction and retention your front office staff and their ability to communicate is going to have a direct impact on your reimbursement. Your front office staff really is a patient's only in-person interaction with your billing department. Think about it. This is where we ask patients to sign your practices, financial policy, and the credit card on file policy. When the patient has a question about it, who are they going to ask the person at the front desk for us who asks the patient for payment for their patient responsibility component, the front desk staff.

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This means that the front desk staff needs to understand health insurance requirements, including the patient responsibility, the front desk person functions as a financial counselor. They collect money, but they also have to offer alternative payment solutions. And of course your front desk staff needs to be able to explain the patient's insurance benefits to the patient. If you're thinking that you need to hire someone with factual knowledge, or you need to train them. Yes, of course that's part of it, but you also have to train them how to interact with those patients. You can train people to be active listeners. You can teach them insurance basics, giving them policies and scripts will go a long way towards helping your staff to adapt their communication style to their audience because you've given them the framework.

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But I want to come back to the communication skills that aren't really something that you can teach. Let me put a point on this. I am sure that there have been times that you've wondered, how did this person ever get this customer service job, or why in the world did their employer hire them to be the face of their business? Friendliness, empathy and respect are not qualities that you can easily teach. Sure. There are things that you can do to nurture these behaviors, but basically someone either has them or they don't. I know that when you need to hire an employee, you're preoccupied with what the job description should include.

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I promise that I'll be back in a future episode to talk to you about job responsibilities for your front desk. And of course you'll need that list of responsibilities to write the job description and the ad for that position. It's these intangible qualities that you're going to want to evaluate. When you are interviewing that potential front desk candidate, do they smile? Are they dynamic or are they monotone? Do they make eye contact? Do they stand up? When you walk in a room, do they have a firm handshake? Do they say please? And thank you. I know that these are all things that your mother taught you to do, but they speak volumes about the person more than any job is ever going to tell you, you will want to give the candidate a couple of vignettes and ask them, what would you do?

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Like what do you do with the patient who's demanding? Or what do you do with the patient who won't pay their copay? Actually, I personally love to role play with whoever I'm interviewing, because it's going to tell you how they handle the situation you want to know. Are they going to get flustered? Do they get angry? What is their behavior? Like? Just remember this person is going to be the face of your practice. If you were the patient, would you feel that this person is friendly, empathetic, and respectful? Would you feel that they're genuine and genuinely interested? Do you trust them? You want the answer to be a resounding? Yes. And if it's not, don't hire them in the long run.

0 (12m 46s):

Good communication skills are going to be more important to you in terms of success at that front desk position than any other quality or skillset that's listed on the job responsibilities for that front desk position. Thanks for joining me. Please be sure to sign up for my newsletter below, I'll be sending you tips on how to start a practice, grow a practice, and then add multiple services so that you can maximize your revenue.