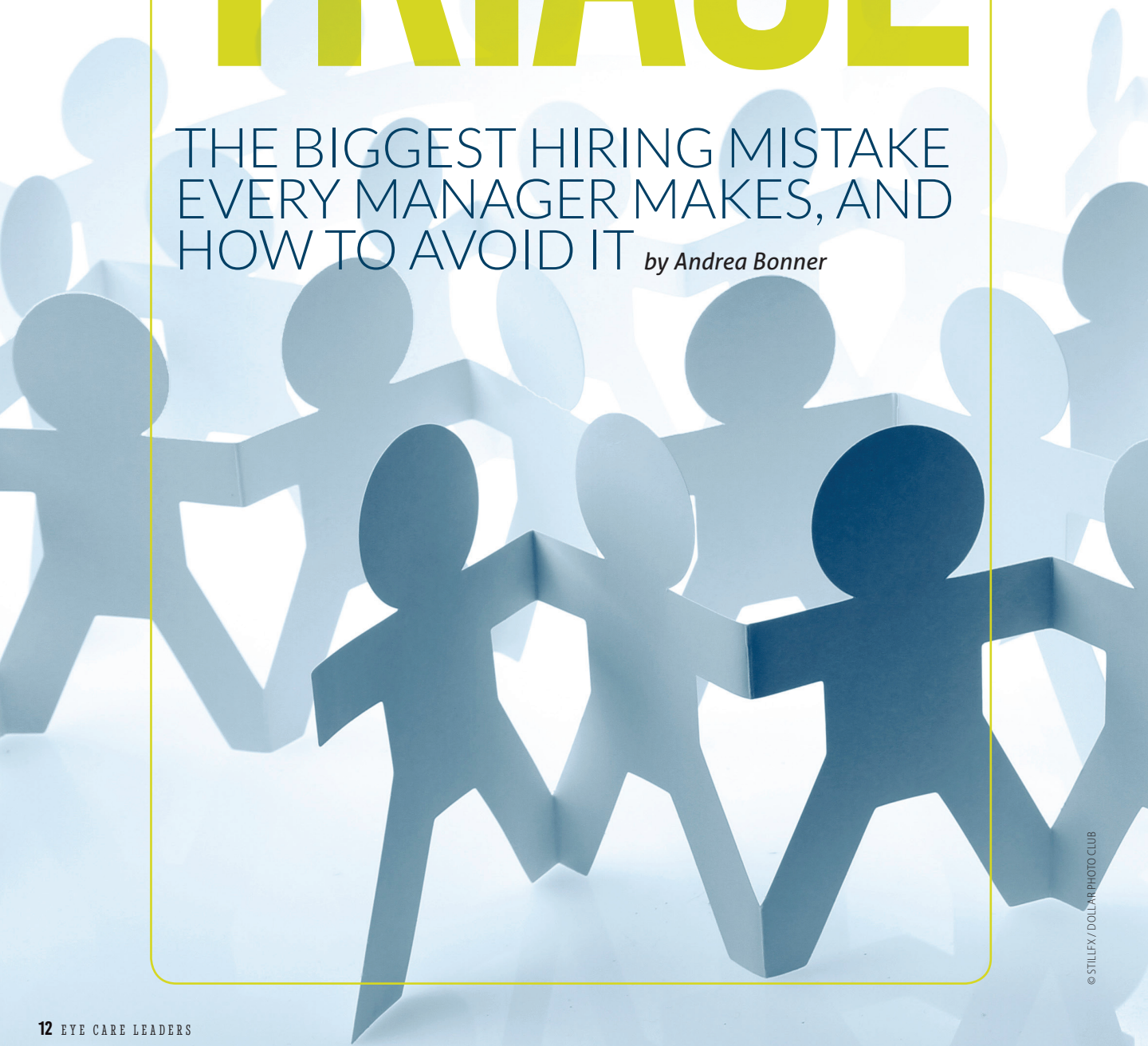


TEAM-BUILDING TRIAGE

THE BIGGEST HIRING MISTAKE
EVERY MANAGER MAKES, AND
HOW TO AVOID IT *by Andrea Bonner*





Have you ever seen one of those TV shows like *My First Place* or *House Hunters*? Homebuyers tour different properties, and decide which one to buy. Viewers watch them carp about the ugly paint colors and deficient landscaping of an otherwise perfect house. You know, things they could change for a few hundred bucks. Do you ever wonder why these buyers can't focus on the big picture?

When it comes to the hiring process, many hiring managers morph into those tunnel-visioned homebuyers. Those responsible for hiring (whether they are physicians, administrators, or optical managers) often complain about finding the right people. In reality, they're not even looking for the right people.

Look, hiring is tough. You're short-staffed and everyone is going crazy. You need to fill that position, and soon. You're faced with a huge pile of resumes that you really don't have time for. So, you pick the first few with the right work experience. You interview two or three of those applicants. You hire one, cross your fingers, and hope whoever it is doesn't make off with the Botox and the Gucci frames.

And that's where most hiring managers fail. They hire based on skills and experience, when they should be hiring according to personality and abilities. Like the homebuyers who pass up their dream home because it had salmon-colored walls, they focus too much on what is changeable (skills), and not enough on what isn't (personality).

To be fair, most hiring managers feel like they're choosing the most qualified applicants. They have the right degrees or certifications. They know how to handle the equipment, fit frames, and use the software. But most skills can be taught, if the employee has the aptitude. With personality and attitude, however, what you see is usually what you get. Smart hiring managers hire according to the things they can't change, not the things they can.

Don't take this out of context. You sometimes need specialists and staff members with technical chops. But while past experience is important, your team's dynamic is even more important. A mismatch can have a huge negative impact on staff morale through every level of your practice. Even worse, it could damage productivity, patient relationships, and your bottom line.



Hiring for attitude, personality, and potential is easier said than done. It's tough to be a good judge of character when you only spend a few seconds reading an applicant's resume, or a few minutes with an interviewee. Most applicants will be putting their best face forward, and many hiring managers simply don't know what to look for.

Look at the big picture.

You may run a medical practice, but you are in the service industry, says practice consultant Cheryl Welch. Exams and medical treatment are not what keeps patients coming back, Welch says. It's the personal care and reputable service they receive from you and your staff. "If I want cheap glasses with no customer service, I'll buy them online," she quips. You need people who know the fundamentals of their job. But the most experienced, knowledgeable staff member who just happens to also alienate coworkers and patients is going to be a disaster. The specific personality traits you want will depend largely on the position you're hiring for, but there are a few larger themes to keep in mind:

Look for teamwork and collaboration skills:

The best employees are able to discern how their part fits into the whole, even if they're fiercely independent.

- **Ask candidates to describe a time when he or she had to gain support for an initiative.** Did they reach their desired outcome? Why do they think they succeeded or failed?
- **Ask them to tell you about a time when they had a conflict with a coworker or customer.** Find out the details, how the candidate handled it, and how things turned out.

Look for transferrable skills: An eye care practice has a lot of moving parts. Versatile employees who are willing to pitch in wherever they're needed are invaluable. You don't want people who will say "that's not my job."

- **Ask the candidate about a time when they noticed a process wasn't working or mistakes were being made.** What, if anything, did they do about it?
- **Ask about a time when they had to make a difficult or unpopular decision** (it could be something as small as choosing the restaurant for the practice holiday party—hey, people are picky!). How did they handle it?

“ In my eyes, personality always wins... job-specific skills can be learned, but you can't train a personality. ”
—Sir Richard Branson

TIP

Interviewees expect to game certain interview questions, and will tell you what you want to hear (does anyone even ask "What is your biggest weakness?" anymore?). Ask questions to draw out facts, not opinions. Do this by asking the initial question, then dig deeper with follow-up questions to keep the conversation going. Think: "So then what happened . . . ?" "Then what did you say . . . ?"

TESTING, TESTING, 1, 2, 3

More and more employers are using personality tests as part of their hiring process. Significant improvements in efficacy coupled with the falling cost of technology have made them accessible to even small practices. But controversy swirls around these assessments. Detractors say that the tests preemptively disqualify too many applicants, and that the tests are not reliable in terms of predicting job performance. Proponents say that the tests reduce turnover by more accurately determining the right fit, and that performance issues can usually be addressed, while personality issues can't.

So, do personality tests actually work? And should your practice be using one? Certified executive coach Cheryl Welch answers with a resounding 'yes.'

The number one complaint when it comes to team-building and interpersonal dynamics is a lack of communication, Welch says. Everyone processes information differently based on their personality types. When

Look for open mindedness: You know that there is no typical day in an eye care practice—the course can change on a dime. The right employees are flexible, comfortable with change, and willing to try new and different tactics. They should be eager to absorb and process new information, changing course when necessary.

- **Ask about a time when a candidate had to change their mind** about something, and how it happened.
- **Ask about a time when he or she disagreed with a manager's idea or decision**, but still had to follow their instructions.

Look for growth: Rather than focusing on the number of accomplishments or length of time at their last employer, look for a pattern of progression. You want employees that are ready to meet challenges and engage in their positions.

- **Ask applicants about a goal they've set and how they accomplished it.** If they didn't succeed, ask them why and what they would do differently next time.
- **Ask them to describe a past employer's management techniques**, what they think worked well, and what they would do differently.



TIP Remember that a personality test is just one aspect of the hiring decision—don't use it as the sole decision-making factor. Use it to add dimension to interviews and to shed light on candidates' strengths and weaknesses.

staff members aren't aware of these differences and how to handle them, she says, it leads to frustration within the inner workings of your practice. Personality assessments for new hires will not only ensure that you get the right personality type for each position, but also ensures that you have a balance of types that complement each other. You don't want a practice full of people who all have the same personality, she cautions.

How do these tests work? Typically, a practice will analyze the personality types of their best employees in a given position, and find out what differentiates those employees from the rest. It's tough to do this on your own, so it's worth it to hire a consultant who specializes in this area, advises Welch. Next, you'd use that data to create a profile of their ideal worker. Then, you'd try to find people who test similarly.

The point in the hiring process at which you'd want to use a personality assessment will vary, according to Welch. For high-level or strategic positions, use it early in the process to narrow your pool of applicants. For front office or tech positions, first narrow your pool, then test. The reason? Candidates from strategic positions will likely come from diverse professional backgrounds, which makes it difficult to cull the herd without inadvertently excluding a great candidate.



TURN LEMONS INTO LEMONADE

Hiring for personality and potential is easier said than done. No matter how careful you are, you'll probably end up with one of these personalities on your team. During her presentation at AAQ2015, Andrea V. Gray, MD pointed out The Seven Deadly Employee Behaviors, along with how to redirect them and make them work for you:

- **The Downer:** This is the quintessential negative employee; you can always count on them to find the downside. They also like to paint themselves as a victim—"Poor Me" is their motto. Unfortunately, this personality defect is the most noticeable to patients.

Turn that frown upside down: Downers are usually adept at thinking ahead and identifying trouble spots. Look to them to "poke holes" in new initiatives and create an action plan in preparation.

- **The Dangerous Duo:** Two heads are usually better than one—but not in this case. For these workplace allies, teamwork and loyalty extend only to each other. They gossip, exclude others, and make their own rules.

Divide and conquer: Forming close personal connections is second nature to these employees, so if they're competent, consider giving them a mentoring role (just monitor them closely).

- **The Prima Donna:** This bright, skilled, and often longstanding employee thinks she is irreplaceable and above discipline. Critical and bossy, she circumvents management and does things her own way, regardless of the rules.

Crowning achievement: Channel her desire for independence by assigning a project where she has freedom and a degree of authority under your supervision.

- **The Draminator:** To this employee, everything's a crisis—and if it's not, they'll create one. They escalate small problems by overreacting, getting emotional, and manipulating sympathetic listeners.

Curtain call: The Draminator draws people in by playing on their emotions and solves problems via social connections. Capitalize on this by assigning them responsibility for positive PR for your next big office change.

- **The Excuse Artist:** No matter the issue, the Excuse Artist is always ready with an alibi, extenuating circumstances, and a reason why it's someone else's fault. They quickly erode their work environment, fostering resentment among staff members.

Paint a different picture: Creativity is this employee's strong suit—he just needs to learn how to put it to good use. Assign a task that requires innovation; it will encourage him to be more invested in the job.

- **The Know It All:** It doesn't matter if they're wrong—the Know It All is always right. Their superior attitude leads them to become overly critical, rejecting others' opinions and ideas out of hand.

By the book: This employee loves to be seen as an expert—so make them one. Invest in some continuing education and have him or her teach the staff what they've learned.

- **The Plodder:** The carpet in your office may as well be quicksand for this foot-dragging, procrastinating employee. Their workload magically expands to fit the time allotted. But decreased productivity is not only hurting your bottom line—even worse, it's contagious.

Analysis paralysis: The upside of The Plodder is that they are often careful and deliberate. Assign them detail-oriented tasks like updating your policy manual or the practice's website.



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STAFF YOUR OPTICAL SHOP TO BRING IN REVENUE

News Flash: Hiring a skilled optician won't guarantee the success of your retail optical. Yes, the appropriate credentials are necessary, but don't overlook these key factors when hiring opticians, managers, and retail staff:

Hire people who look the part.

This is an area where physicians often miss the mark, Welch notes. Your retail staff is selling visual aids, but they're also selling an image. Staff should be fashion-oriented and well put together. They should reflect an image that you want to sell, and one that patients want to buy.

Welch uses the comparison of a high-end cosmetics counter, or a beauty emporium like Sephora. Women aren't likely to buy pricey makeup from someone who looks like they don't know how to use it themselves, she points out. Retail optical operates the same way—you're selling fashion, and that can be expensive. Patients are more willing to spend the money when it looks like your staff knows what they're talking about, from a style standpoint. It's really tough to teach someone style, so hire people that already have it.


Hire people who can sell.

In your retail optical, your staff may already have customer service down to a science. But that doesn't mean they can sell, says Welch. You want someone who is a little bit aggressive, but won't turn off customers. Sales is an area particularly suited to personality and behavioral testing. You need someone who has what psychologists call "drive," and "drive" is either there or it's not. For this reason, it's best to use a personality assessment early in the screening process for sales staff. If they don't have the basic trait of "drive," even the best training won't pay off.

Another surprising trait to look for? Many assessments gauge integrity and honesty, and a lot of times those qualities are a good thing. But in some positions (like sales), a high level of integrity may not be something you'd prioritize. We're not talking about someone who's completely dishonest and ready to embezzle you into bankruptcy. Rather, think of a question like "Do you think it is ok to lie if it means sparing someone's feelings?" A person who answers "no" exhibits a high degree of integrity, but will likely put a dent in your sales figures.

Why? Many times optical staff sell according to their own financial situation, and this can prevent them from making the high dollar sales of premium lenses and high-end frames, says Welch. Your staff may know that those designer frames cost \$4.00 to make and have been marked up many times—but they shouldn't care. A good salesperson will put their own feelings aside, and if the customer wants to spend, let them spend.

Hire someone who knows retail.

Many physicians assume that extensive experience in the optical industry means that the candidate will manage their retail optical successfully. However, optical experience and all the credentials in the world won't ensure that they'll have the financial know-how and basic business skills that running a retail operation requires. This includes knowledge of pricing strategies, cost-of-goods analysis, vendor negotiation, profit margins, inventory management, financial reporting, and more. 



TAKE YOUR PRACTICE FROM GOOD TO

GREAT

ASK, “FIRST WHO,
THEN WHAT?”

by Erin Masercola

“Great vision
without great people
is irrelevant.”

—Jim Collins, *Good to Great*

Want ideas on how to make your eye care practice more successful? Take a page or two from Jim Collins’ now-classic business how-to book *Good to Great* (2001). Collins and his team of researchers looked at 1,425 “good companies,” examined their performance over a 40-year period, and identified habits that caused them to pull ahead of the pack and outperform their competitors to become “great.”

HERE’S THE GOOD NEWS: YOU DON’T NEED TO WRITE A MISSION STATEMENT

“When we first began the research project, we expected to find that the first step in taking a company from good to great would be to set a new direction, a new vision and strategy for the company, and then to get people committed and aligned behind that new direction,” Collins writes. “We found something quite the opposite.”

As a practice leader, think of yourself as a bus driver. Good leaders are like bus drivers who first get the right people on the bus (and the wrong people off the bus) and then figure out where to drive it, Collins explains. If you’ve got the right people on the bus (and in the right seats), your practice can meet any challenge as it grows and as times change—as they always have and always will in eye care.

GROW PEOPLE AS YOU GROW YOUR PRACTICE

On a flight home from the recent SECO conference, I sat next to a young woman whose boss, I’m betting, is strategic enough to think “first who, then what” as he grows his optometry practice. I’ll call her “Kelly” (not her real name).

At first glance, Kelly seemed like nothing special—she’d grown up in a small town, had some community college, and had been hired six months previously to work the front desk of an eye care practice. But it was soon clear that Kelly has strong people skills that are an asset to the front desk. (I was feeling grumpy and introverted on that flight, but she soon had me talking happily, and I’m sure she does the same for her practice’s patients.)



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Over cocktails and conversation (Kelly, Kahlua on the rocks, me, bourbon neat), I saw why the doctor Kelly worked for had asked her to get on his bus. She had a mind like a sponge, and I could tell the doctor had gotten his money's worth when he sent her and her clinical tech colleague to SECO for training.

I suspect the doctor Kelly works for hired her because she has an emotional intelligence. And you just can't teach EI as easily as you can teach specific back office skills like coding and billing or even some of the clinical skills that techs need.

Successful practice managers tell me they make similar hiring decisions when looking for good office

staff or techs, especially in areas where good entry-level staff are hard to find. They look primarily for smarts, high EQ, and a general commitment to excellence and patient care and then train up their hires on particular skills. To help with this training, practice managers often take advantage of excellent educational opportunities like SECO or other association events.

"BE RIGOROUS, NOT RUTHLESS, IN PEOPLE DECISIONS."

In Good to Great, Collins lays out two rules for making sure the people on your practice's "bus" are the right people who can take your practice where you want it to go.

1. **"When in doubt, don't hire—keep looking."**

2. **"When you know you need to make a people change, act."** This doesn't always mean firing the person. Sometimes, you have a good person in the wrong bus seat, Collins explains, and as a leader, you need to work to match your people's skills to your practice's needs and opportunities.

Want to learn other techniques for taking your eye care practice from Good to Great? Visit our blog at www.theeclgroup.com/magazine.



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