



Managing Your Practice: A Guide to

MANAGING EMPLOYEES

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Contents

- 3 Retaining Employees
- 5 Performance Reviews
- 6 Salary Increases

- 6 Resolving Employee Conflict
- 7 Disciplinary Procedures

- 8 Terminating an Employee
- 8 Creating a Respectful Workplace



Introduction

MANAGING EMPLOYEES

Welcome to Doctors Nova Scotia's Business of Medicine guide to managing employees. This guide is designed to support you in managing employees effectively.

Effective employee management is a cornerstone of a successful medical practice, as it directly impacts the performance, culture and long-term sustainability of any business. It goes beyond supervising daily operations; effective management also involves intentionally cultivating a respectful and supportive workplace that attracts, develops and retains top talent.

This guide provides an overview of the key elements to managing employees effectively. It covers strategies for retaining high-performing staff, conducting meaningful performance reviews, and implementing fair and transparent salary increases. Additionally, it offers guidance on resolving workplace conflicts, navigating disciplinary procedures and, when necessary, managing employee terminations with professionalism and care.



RETAINING EMPLOYEES

Employee-related expenses are often the largest operational cost for a physician in private practice, so it is critically important to retain high-performing employees. The estimated cost of turnover is significant, approximately the same as the annual salary for a member of admin staff and one-and-a-half times the salary of a mid-level manager. These costs are related to lost productivity, recruitment and advertising efforts, the candidate selection process, onboarding and training, as well as the administrative tasks associated with an employee's departure.

To retain valuable employees, a holistic approach is required. This includes appropriate compensation, benefits, recognition, communication, work-life balance and work environment.

Compensation

Compensation and benefits are critical components in attracting and retaining top talent. Physicians should determine how their employee compensation packages compare to market levels. While comprehensive market data by position can be limited, benchmarking against similar-sized practices and inquiring about their wage structures can provide valuable insights. Payscale Canada may also be helpful. It provides free salary comparisons based on job title, skills, experience and education. Meeting or exceeding market compensation levels can help with retention, while lagging behind market levels could cause higher turnover.

Benefits

There are many employee benefits you may choose to provide – some examples are listed below. A cost/benefit analysis should be conducted to determine affordability versus value for your employees.

Health and wellness benefits

- extended health insurance (prescription drugs, vision, paramedical services)
- dental insurance
- mental health support (for example, employee assistance programs)
- disability insurance (short- and long-term)
- life insurance

Financial and retirement benefits

- pension plans (for example, defined benefit or defined contribution)
- group RRSPs (registered retirement savings plans)
- employer matching contributions
- bonuses and incentive pay

Work-life balance benefits

- paid time off (vacation, sick leave, personal days)
- parental leave top-ups
- flexible work arrangements (remote work, compressed workweeks)
- paid holidays

Professional development

- tuition reimbursement
- continuing education allowance
- conference attendance support
- licensing and certification reimbursement





Need a helping hand?

Doctors Nova Scotia's physician advisors are ready to help you navigate managing clinic staff in your practice.

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Note: This guide is not intended as legal or professional advice or opinion. It is recommended that physicians and staff members seek legal or professional advice should concerns arise.

Recognition

Recognizing employee excellence is a powerful strategic tool for enhancing engagement and performance. When used thoughtfully, recognition reinforces positive behaviour and creates a workplace culture where staff feel valued and supported, which leads to feeling focused and motivated. Place importance on celebrating achievements, both big and small. This can include verbal praise, thank-you notes or more formal recognition programs.

Communication

Clear, consistent communication fosters trust with employees. When they feel informed and included, they're more likely to trust decisions and direction. Employees who feel heard and valued are more engaged and motivated, and when they feel safe to share ideas and concerns, it fosters a culture of innovation. Open dialogue can lead to creative solutions and continuous improvement.

Work-life balance

Employers can support work-life balance by creating a workplace culture that respects employees' time, well-being and personal responsibilities. Here are some effective strategies for doing that:

- **Offer flexible work arrangements** by allowing employees to adjust schedules for personal needs.
- **Encourage use of paid time off** by promoting regular use of vacation days and ensuring there isn't a culture of guilt around taking time off. You may want to provide mental health or personal days.
- **Manage workload and expectations** by setting realistic deadlines and goals, avoiding excessive overtime or after-hours communication and regularly checking in to ensure workloads are manageable.
- **Support employee health and wellness** by promoting a culture of self-care and support. This could include offering access to wellness programs and mental health resources. A simple yet effective approach is to actively encourage regular breaks and ensure that staff take time for lunch, which helps prevent burnout and promotes sustained productivity.
- **Foster open communication** by

creating a culture where employees feel safe discussing burnout or stress. It's important to be able to recognize signs of overwork and intervene as needed.

- **Solicit input from your employees;** ask what is most meaningful for them.

Physicians, due to the demanding nature of their work, are not always ideal role models for work-life balance. If this is the case, it's important not to project those same expectations onto your employees. Instead, strive to create a workplace culture that supports balance and well-being, even if your own schedule is less flexible.

Work environment

The goal is to cultivate a workplace environment where employees genuinely want to come to work each day – not just because they have to, but because they feel valued, supported and inspired. This sense of belonging and purpose is just as important to your employees as compensation or benefits. When people enjoy their work environment, they are more engaged, more productive and more likely to contribute positively to the team. Creating this kind of atmosphere involves fostering mutual respect, recognizing contributions, encouraging open communication and promoting a healthy work-life balance. Ultimately, when employees feel good about where they work, everyone benefits.

Know the signs

There are some common warning signs that employees are dissatisfied and are considering leaving, such as frequent absences, a decline in performance or productivity, negative attitude or behaviour, resistance to feedback, and change in or lack of communication. You may even see signs that an employee is job hunting.

If an employee is showing one or more of these signs, it is best to respond thoughtfully and proactively. Schedule a one-on-one meeting in a confidential, non-confrontational setting, express concern, and listen actively and without judgment. Try to identify the root cause of their dissatisfaction and determine if changes or support would help improve their experience. It's always a good idea to document those discussions.



PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

Performance reviews are essential for effective workforce management. They are designed to evaluate employee performance against established goals and expectations, providing a structured opportunity to assess how well individuals are meeting their responsibilities. Performance reviews also serve as a platform to deliver feedback that reinforces employee strengths while addressing areas that need improvement.

To conduct the most beneficial performance reviews for your employees, the following tips are recommended:

Prepare in advance

- Review the employee's past performance, goals and feedback.
- Gather input from relevant sources (for example, peers, supervisors).
- Identify key achievements and areas needing improvement.

Set a positive tone

- Create a comfortable, private setting for the conversation.
- Start with appreciation for the employee's contributions.
- Frame the review as a collaborative discussion, not a critique.

Be specific and objective

- Use concrete examples to support feedback.
- Focus on behaviours and outcomes, not personal traits.
- Avoid vague or overly general comments.

Encourage two-way communication

- Ask open-ended questions to invite employee input.
- Listen actively and acknowledge their perspective.
- Address concerns or suggestions raised during the discussion.

Focus on development

- Discuss career goals and growth opportunities.
- Identify training or support needed to

improve performance.

- Set clear, achievable goals for the next review period.

Document and follow up

- Summarize key points and agreed-upon action items.
- Share a written summary with the employee.
- Schedule regular check-ins to track progress and offer support.

Be consistent and fair

- Apply the same standards and process across all employees.
- Be mindful of unconscious bias.
- Ensure the review aligns with company policies and values.



SALARY INCREASES

Salary increases are important for several key reasons, both from the perspective of employees and employers. They reward employees for their hard work, achievements and loyalty, and help retain top performers. Employers that offer regular and fair salary increases are more attractive to job seekers. It signals a commitment to employee growth and financial well-being.

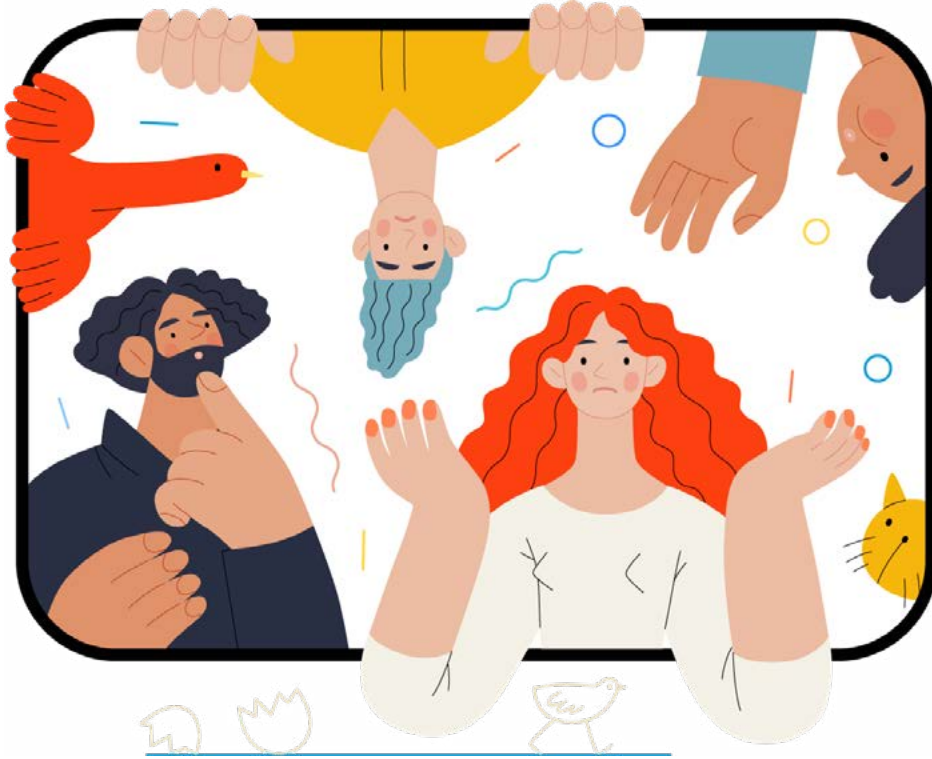
Employers commonly use the following methods for salary increases:

- **Merit-based increases** are salary increases awarded based on individual performance (these are also called step or range increases). The purpose is to reward high-performing employees and incentivize continued excellence. This method of salary increase is tied to performance reviews or achievement of specific goals.
- **Cost-of-living adjustments (COLA)** are increases given to offset inflation and rising living costs. The purpose is to maintain employees' purchasing power over time. This method of salary increase is often applied annually across the board. CPI for Canada and by province can be tracked online at: inflationcalculator.ca/2025-cpi-and-inflation-rates-for-canada/. It provides for monthly and yearly CPI percentages.
- **Market adjustments** are increases that align with current market rates for similar roles. The purpose is to stay competitive and retain talent. These adjustments are typically made as a result of a compensation review or salary survey.
- **Promotion-related increases** are raises given when an employee moves to a higher-level position. This reflects increased responsibilities and a new job scope. This salary increase typically accompanies a title change or role upgrade.
- **Equity adjustments** are raises to correct internal pay disparities. These increases ensure fairness and compliance with pay equity standards and are commonly implemented after internal audits or employee concerns.
- **Bonuses or incentives** are a form of additional compensation given to employees beyond their regular salary or wages. It is typically used to reward performance, motivate behaviour or recognize achievements that contribute to the success of the practice.

RESOLVING EMPLOYEE CONFLICT

Resolving employee conflict effectively is essential for maintaining a healthy, productive workplace. Here's a step-by-step approach employers and managers can follow if faced with having to address workplace conflict:

- **Address the conflict early:** Don't ignore signs of tension or disagreement. Prompt intervention prevents escalation and long-term resentment.
- **Create a safe environment:** Choose a neutral, private setting for discussions and ensure all parties feel heard and respected.
- **Listen to all sides:** Allow each employee to share their perspective without interruption and use active listening: paraphrase, ask clarifying questions and show empathy.
- **Identify the root cause:** Look beyond surface issues to understand underlying concerns. Determine whether the conflict is due to miscommunication, workload, personality differences or unclear expectations.
- **Focus on interests, not positions:** Encourage employees to express what they need rather than what they demand and aim for solutions that satisfy the core interests of both parties.
- **Collaborate on solutions:** Involve employees in brainstorming fair, practical resolutions. Agree on specific actions and responsibilities moving forward.
- **Follow up:** Monitor the situation to ensure the conflict doesn't resurface and provide support or mediation if needed.
- **Document the process:** Keep a record of the conflict, discussions and agreed-upon outcomes. This helps with accountability and future reference if issues recur.



DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES

Maintaining a productive and respectful workplace requires clear expectations and consistent accountability. Disciplining employees is a critical component of effective management, aimed not at punishment, but at correcting behaviour, reinforcing standards and supporting professional growth. When handled fairly and constructively, disciplinary actions can help preserve team morale, ensure compliance with office policies, and foster a culture of responsibility and improvement.

The following disciplinary procedures are designed to ensure fairness, consistency and legal compliance:

- **Establish clear policies:** Ensure employees are aware of workplace rules and expectations. Having a policy related to employee conduct will make dealing with disciplinary matters easier for everyone involved.
- **Investigate the issue:** Gather facts promptly and objectively. Interview those involved and document those discussions. It's important to maintain confidentiality throughout the process.
- **Determine the severity:** Once the details have been gathered, assess whether the issue is minor (for example,

tardiness) or serious (for example, harassment or theft). The employer should consider the employee's history and intent. Is this an ongoing issue or is this out of character for the employee? The answer to that question will help determine the appropriate disciplinary action.

- **Apply progressive discipline (if appropriate):** This approach gives employees a chance to correct behaviour before more serious action is taken.
 - Verbal warning: Have an informal conversation to address the issue. Be sure to document the discussion.
 - Written warning: Provide a formal written warning outlining the problem, expectations and consequences. Ensure this is signed by both the manager and employee.
 - Final warning or suspension: This may include a performance improvement plan (PIP), which is a formal document designed to help employees improve their job performance by outlining specific areas of concern, measurable goals and a timeline for achieving those goals. A good example of a PIP is provided here. Temporary removal from duties

is an option if necessary.

- **Termination:** This is a last resort when previous steps fail or for severe misconduct. Ensure compliance with employment laws, which is discussed further in Section 7. If termination is being considered, consult legal counsel. Consulting legal counsel before terminating an employee is a crucial step to help ensure that the process is fair, compliant and minimizes the risk of legal repercussions for the physician or the practice.

- **Document everything:** Keep detailed records of all the steps taken, including dates, communications and outcomes. Documenting the process protects the practice and supports transparency. Throughout this process, deliver feedback to the employee privately and professionally. Allow them to respond or explain their side. Ensure actions are non-discriminatory and consistent.

TERMINATING AN EMPLOYEE

Terminating an employee is one of the most challenging responsibilities a manager may face. Whether due to performance issues, misconduct or organizational changes, the process must be handled with care, professionalism and legal compliance. A well-managed termination not only protects the organization from potential legal risks but also upholds the dignity of the departing employee and maintains morale among remaining staff.

This section outlines the key considerations for conducting terminations respectfully and effectively.

- **Legal compliance:** As noted in Section 6, if termination is being considered, consult legal counsel to ensure all aspects of employment law are being considered. Review the Nova Scotia Labour Standards Code requirements for ending employment here: [Nova Scotia Labour Standards – When an employer ends employment](#). This includes information related to written notice requirements, requirements related to length of service, ending employment without notice and so on.
- **Documentation:** Maintain clear documentation of performance issues, disciplinary actions and any warnings given. It is also important to ensure similar cases have been handled in a consistent manner to avoid claims of unfair treatment.
- **Communication:** Prepare what will be said, who will be present and how the message will be delivered. Communicate the decision with empathy, clarity and professionalism.
- **Timing and setting:** If possible, be mindful of choosing the right time. Avoid terminations during emotionally charged periods or in public settings. Conduct the meeting in a private, neutral space to maintain dignity and confidentiality.
- **Final pay and benefits:** Determine if severance pay will be offered and under what conditions. Ensure the employee receives their final wages, including unused vacation or paid time off, in accordance with Nova Scotia Labour standards.
- **Security and access:** Collect keys, ID badges, laptops or other equipment. Disable access to company systems, email accounts and sensitive data promptly.
- **Impact on the team:** Inform the team in a way that maintains morale and respects the privacy of the departing employee. Be available to address concerns and maintain trust within the team.

CREATING A RESPECTFUL WORKPLACE

Effective staff management and the cultivation of a respectful workplace are inextricably connected. Strong leadership is one of the most powerful drivers of a culture rooted in respect, inclusion and accountability. A respectful workplace is one where every individual feels valued, safe and supported – conditions that are fostered through thoughtful, consistent and empathetic management practices. The key elements that contribute to such an environment are:

- **Mutual respect:** Employees treat each other with courtesy, kindness and professionalism. Differences in background, opinion and experience are acknowledged and appreciated.
- **Open communication:** Clear, honest and respectful dialogue is encouraged at all levels and feedback is given constructively and received with openness.
- **Inclusivity and diversity:** All individuals are welcomed and included, regardless of race, gender, age, religion, ability or background. Diverse perspectives are actively sought and valued.
- **Fairness and equity:** Policies and decisions are applied consistently and without favoritism and opportunities for growth and advancement are accessible to all.
- **Accountability:** Everyone is responsible for their actions and behaviour. Issues such as harassment, discrimination or bullying are addressed promptly and appropriately.
- **Supportive leadership:** Leaders model respectful behaviour and set the tone for workplace culture. They listen to concerns, provide guidance and foster a positive environment.
- **Recognition and appreciation:** Contributions are acknowledged and celebrated, and employees feel seen and valued for their work.
- **Safe work environment:** Physical and psychological safety are prioritized and employees feel comfortable speaking up without fear of retaliation.

