

What Your Team Actually Wants (It's Not What You Think)

By Amy Anderson, MBA

If you asked your staff what would make them stay, would you know the answer? Most practice managers and surgeons think they do. Most are wrong.



Make recognition a leadership habit. Call it out in team huddles. Send a quick message when you catch someone doing something right. It costs nothing and matters more than you think.

After two decades working with aesthetic practices, I can tell you that turnover is one of the most expensive and underestimated problems in this space. Turnover rates in healthcare settings can exceed 20% annually (Source: Becker's Hospital Review), and replacing a single employee can cost anywhere from 50% to 200% of their annual salary when you factor in recruiting, onboarding, lost productivity, and the inevitable dip in patient experience while someone new finds their footing (Source: HR Morning). For a practice with a team of five to ten people, even one or two departures a year adds up fast.

But the reason people leave is probably not what you think.

THE GAP THAT'S COSTING YOU

A study published in the Journal of Medical Practice Management asked both managers and employees to rank what employees want most from their jobs. The disconnect was striking. Managers ranked high wages as the number one motivator. Employees ranked it fifth. Meanwhile, employees ranked "feeling appreciation for work done" as their top priority. Managers ranked it eighth.

Read that again. The thing your team wants most is to feel genuinely appreciated, and it is the thing managers are least likely to be focused on delivering. That gap is exactly where good people decide to leave.

A SIMPLE MODEL FOR KEEPING YOUR BEST PEOPLE

Retention is not about making everyone happy. It is about creating an environment where people feel capable, supported, and valued. In my work with practices, I rely on a simple model to get there: Diagnose, Develop, and Recognize.

DIAGNOSE

Most turnover is preventable, but only if you catch the warning signs before someone is already mentally out the door. By the time an employee gives notice, the decision was usually made weeks or months earlier.

Proactive retention means you are asking questions, not just reacting to resignations. What is this person's workload really like? Do they have clarity about their role and what success looks like? Are there pain points in their processes that no one has bothered to fix? A brief, honest one-on-one conversation (not a performance review, just a real check-in) can surface issues early enough to act on them.

Build proactive check-ins into your schedule. Make it a habit, not a crisis response.

DEVELOP

In many practices, career development is an afterthought. There is no path forward, no skills being built, no sense that the job is leading anywhere.

You do not need a formal career ladder to address this; you just need to intentionally create growth opportunities. Cross-train your team. Give high performers a chance to lead a project or mentor a newer hire. Invest in continuing education. When people feel like they are growing, they have a reason to stay.

RECOGNIZE

This is the highest-leverage, lowest-cost retention tool available, and it is chronically underused.

Recognition does not require a bonus or a party. It requires consistency and specificity. "Great job today" is nice but forgettable. "The way you handled that patient concern this afternoon showed real judgment, and that is exactly the standard we are trying to set" is the kind of feedback people remember. It tells someone not just that they did well, but that you noticed, and that what they did mattered.

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THE BOTTOM LINE

Your team is not waiting for a raise to decide whether to stay. They are watching every day to see whether they feel seen, valued, and set up to succeed. The practices that retain great people are not necessarily the ones paying the most; they are the ones leading the best.

Amy Anderson, founder and CEO of ACG Practice Partners, is a seasoned healthcare business coach. With over two decades of experience working with plastic surgeons, Amy is an authority in practice operations and the development of high-performing teams. She has coached hundreds of surgeons, administrators, PCCs, and team members on building a strong office culture, improving revenue, and optimizing business management practices. Amy's approachable style and practical advice make her a favorite among surgeons and staff alike. Follow Amy on Instagram @amyandersonmba or email her at connect@acgpracticepartners.com.