

55 Low-Cost Ways To Recruit Nurses

By Dr. John Sullivan

While many firms fight a war for talent, that phrase doesn't adequately describe what goes on in the healthcare industry. For most industries, the war for talent is a temporary condition that will eventually end, but the battle to attract and retain talent in healthcare is a struggle that literally has no foreseeable end!

In the good and bad economic cycles of late, hospitals and care facilities have faced shortages, the most visible of which has been a shortage of nurses. Further exacerbating this nursing-shortage problem is the baby boom retirement surge that will tax the current healthcare establishment with a surge of elderly patients armed with disposable incomes and high expectations.

While the problem continues to escalate in size, recruiting and retention budgets for healthcare organizations have not kept pace.

If healthcare recruiting concerns you, and you need to recruit nurses but are one of the many that have little or no budget resources available to you, here are some no-cost or low-cost recruiting and retention suggestions and tips.

Referral-Related Tips

1. **Employee referral programme.** The most effective recruiting tool of all is the ERP. Revisit it and re-energize its marketing program. Consider holding a raffle for a free trip to an exotic place for all of those who made referrals during the quarter. Remember to talk it up at regular management meetings for more impact.
2. **Proactive referrals.** Go directly to your top nurses individually and ask them to increase their referrals (give them

a target of five a month). Ask them specifically to refer their mentees, friends, retirees, and former colleagues.

3. **Give Me 5.** Occasionally individuals draw a blank when asked the question, “Do you know anyone?” In these cases, the best approach is to structure your request. Ask your better nurses to list “the five nurses who have impressed you the most in these specific categories (the best nurse you ever worked with, the most innovative, the best team player, the best manager, the best under pressure, the best with technology, etc.). Then ask them to call these five individuals and try to convince them that it would be great to work with you again. Use the five for direct hiring or, if they’re not interested, for referrals.
4. **Reference referrals.** On the anniversary date of new hires who turn out to be exceptional employees, call the references back and thank them. Then ask them, “Whom else do you know who is also good?” Because these individuals have given good references once, it is highly likely that these new names will also be of high quality.
5. **Ask customers.** Ask patients, strategic partners, vendors, consultants, and suppliers to be referral sources (when there’s no conflict of interest).
6. **Professional association officer referrals.** Ask association officers to be referral sources and to help you identify any “up and coming” nurses.

Event-Related Tips

7. **Professional events.** After referrals, professional events are the best source of quality hires in diversity. Ask the travel office to let everyone attending large industry and functional conferences that you expect them to bring back three great names of either speakers or individuals that ask great questions.
8. **On-site seminar.** Sponsor a technical seminar and then hold it on your site. Offer attendees a tour and provide a

mechanism for them to mingle with your current staff. This is an effective tool when your name isn't that great but your people and facilities are!

9. **Social events.** Craft fairs have been an excellent source for finding nurses. Ask your top nurses for the best events they attend and recruit at them.
10. **Trade fairs.** Top performers invariably go to conferences, while average people stay at home. If your organization has a trade booth, ask your staff to look for top individuals who pass through it. Some organizations even put a recruiter in it.
11. **Bring a friend to work day.** Hold an invited open house on your site and encourage your nurses to bring a top colleague. Have managers show them your best practices, technology, and top people.
12. **Certification courses.** For jobs that require professional certifications, ask attendees from your organization to look for top talent during certification courses. If you're really serious, consider having your top people teach them, and maybe even on your own site.

Contact Former Employees and Interviewees

13. **Boomerangs.** Call all of the good nurses who left your facility over the last few years and ask them whether they would like to return. If they turn you down, ask them to be referral sources. Incidentally, tell top nurses when they quit that you would like to keep in touch with them and that they are welcome back (especially immediately, if their new job isn't as good as the recruiter said).
14. **Almost qualified.** Review "finalists" from previous hiring efforts and see whether they are now more qualified or if you are willing to give them a second look.
15. **Turned us down.** Review finalists who, in the past, rejected your job offers. Try a new approach and try to resell them. If

they say no, ask them whether you can contact them again later.

Identify Individuals During the Hiring Process

16. **References of candidates.** When checking the references of promising candidates, consider them for direct hiring. Incidentally, if you hire either the reference or the individual asking for the reference, you're much more likely to get the other one also. It's also true that if you leave a positive impression with the reference, they will "talk you up" if your candidate happens to call them to get their opinion on which job offer they should accept.

17. **Ask during the interview.** Ask the best interviewees for the names of other good individuals that they know during the interview. If you ask enough interviewees, you will get a pretty good list of top names.

During Orientation for New Hires

18. **First day of new hires.** Ask all new hires on the day they start for the names of good workers at their former facility. Ask them to help you recruit any targeted individuals that they know.

19. **Market research to identify triggers.** During orientation, ask new hires and interns to clarify their specific job-acceptance criteria. Use this information to improve your offer letters.

20. **Why did you say yes?** You can dramatically improve your "sales pitch" if you ask all new hires which specific element of your "sales pitch" had a positive impact on their decision. Also, ask which elements had no impact at all and then which elements actually had a negative impact on their decision process. Use this information to improve your marketing materials, interview processes, and offer process.

Convincing Candidates to Accept Your Offers

21. **Promise them an interview.** Guarantee potential recruits an interview. Consider giving them a reward (a \$10 coffee card) or a free meal if they show up for an interview.
22. **Job descriptions.** If you have a hard time getting individuals to apply, a dull job description is a common reason why. Rewrite your job descriptions to make them more like marketing pieces. Identify the WOW factors that you have and the features that excite your current employees. Put them in your job descriptions and make them compelling.
23. **CEO calls.** Have your CEO call the candidate directly and encourage them to sign on. CEO calls are incredibly effective.
24. **Same-level calls.** Many individuals make a habit of not returning recruiter calls. Instead, have someone at their professional level call them and you will get as much as a three times higher response rate. The reason for this is “professional courtesy” and the opportunity to learn.
25. **Peer interviews.** Many healthcare organizations have found that they get a significantly higher acceptance rate if candidates are interviewed primarily by the individuals with whom they will work directly. Because peers know the job, they can be more convincing and at the same time, more believable than hiring managers.
26. **Select a hiring team.** Some managers just aren’t good salespeople (recruiters). Identify the nurses who are good recruiters and salespeople and let them do most of the hiring. Give them recruiter training and reward them for their efforts. Because they do a lot of hiring, they will naturally be better at it than a single manager who only does hiring once or twice a year.
27. **Free training.** Offer top candidates that you have pre-identified any vacant seats you might in your training classes in order to build a relationship and to assess their capabilities.

28. **Offer them privileges.** Some nurses are reluctant to leave because they will have to start “at the bottom” at a new facility. Offer the very top candidates shift choices for six months and continued preferences if they perform on the job (rank among the top 20%).
29. **Side-by-side offer sheets.** Provide your hiring managers with a single sheet that shows how your offer compares favorably with offers from competing facilities. This helps improve offer acceptance rates.
30. **One-year ahead “hit” list (pre-qualify).** Identify the nurses you really want to hire long before you have an opening. Use that time to pre qualify and to pre-sell them.
31. **Hire them both.** Offer a program where you will hire a nurse and their best friend (colleague, spouse/ partner) at the same time. Offer an exceptional nurse an opportunity to commute together or to work together with their best friend.
32. **Contact them on the right day.** Constantly seek out information about top individuals who might “all of a sudden” be unhappy because their boss/friend just left, a merger has been announced, they didn’t get a raise, they got a bad performance appraisal, or other triggering event. Contact them right away and close the deal.
33. **Involve them.** Ask top individuals to help you “assess” a new idea or program. Then build the relationship to the point where they know you well enough to accept an offer.

New Places to Look for Potential Candidates

34. **Promotion/awards announcements.** Track other facilities announcements of promotions and awards, and then target those that get the awards and promotions. Also target those that are likely to be frustrated because they didn’t get the promotion or award.

35. **Find-you-again profile.** Ask your current nurses, “How would I find you again?” Ask them what healthcare and social events they attend, magazines and journals that they read, TV shows that they watch, etc. Use this information to identify the sources that are the most likely to produce results.
36. **When a competitor is in trouble.** When a competing facility is undergoing cut backs, staff reductions or other labour turmoil, increase your recruiting efforts at their facilities. Ask your current nurses to help you recruit away their best. Recruit outside their parking lot if you must!
37. **Direct mail.** Consider using professional association, website and nursing magazine mailing lists (sorted by local ZIP code) to mail out recruit pieces or email messages.
38. **Hold an informal contest.** Challenge your nursing staff to spend a month informally identifying the best nurses within the region. Make it a friendly competition (with a prize) and encourage each nurse to scour their emails, and address books for the names of potential hires. Encourage your nurses to “ask around”. You might also consider holding a “top nurse” award contest and target the finalists.
39. **Conversions.** Develop a formal process to ask the very best contractors or travellers if they would consider becoming a regular member of your staff.
40. **Retirees.** Some retirees have second thoughts while others are willing to work as “fill-ins” so keep in touch with your own and try to compile a list that you contact periodically.

Build Your Brand

41. **Mentioned in/wrote tech article.** Have your best nurses write articles in nursing journals. Being written about for your best practices is an excellent referring and branding tool.
42. **Speaking opportunities.** Have your best nurses speak at local professional events, at regional trade fairs, and at

national industry conferences. Having them discuss your best practices is an excellent recruiting tool.

43. **Win awards.** If your organization wins best practice or “best place to work” awards, that alone will make recruiting much easier.

Online Sources

44. **Search engine.** Do an Internet search for nurses CVs. Specifically target (by their postcode) those who live within a short commuting distance of your facility.
45. **Chat rooms.** Have your best nurses frequent nursing-related chat rooms and list servers. Have them answer tough questions in order to build your image and brand as a great place to work.
46. **“Push” jobs to top prospects.** Develop an email mail list that “pushes” announcements of relevant job openings to individuals that you are targeting (or that have expressed an interest in receiving position openings).
47. **Online networking sites.** Consider putting short recruiting videos on YouTube, LinkedIn and Facebook.

Other Miscellaneous Approaches

48. **Sell sheet attached to your application.** Attach a “sales sheet” to your hard copy application forms that highlights the best practices and features of your facility.
49. **Hiring consortium to share costs.** If your budget is limited, consider going together with a group of facilities to share recruiting ad and/or career fair costs.

College Recruiting Tips

50. **Interns/Apprentices as on campus university reps.** Ask your interns/part time staff to serve as recruiting representatives when they return to campus. Ask them to visit

nurse-related events and to provide you with the names of the best and what it takes to convince them.

51. **Graduate assistants.** The graduate assistants of top nursing professors not only know the best students, but they are very good at convincing them to accept your new opportunities. Officers of professional student organizations are also excellent talent scouts.
52. **Use last year's hires as sourcers/recruiters.** Ask last year's university hires to help you identify and recruit this year's crop.
53. **Ask university professors.** Ask professors and graduate assistants to be referral sources. Identify the best and begin selling them more than a year before graduation.
54. **Two-years-out-of-university hires.** There is a lot of competition for nurses graduating right out of school. Instead, try re-contacting those you wanted but couldn't get after they are two years out of school. You might find recruiting them now is a lot easier as their preferences change when they become more experienced.
55. **CEO talks.** Having senior executives speak on campus at the local university and give presentations and classes can have an unusually high impact on recruiting.