

# *For the* Long Haul

In an industry notorious for high employee turnover and understaffed facilities, hospitals and other health-care organizations must get creative to attract and retain the best and brightest.

**ANDRAYA VANTREASE**

**H**iring health-care workers? It may take you a while to find a qualified candidate. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the health-care industry will generate 3.2 million new wage and salary jobs between now and 2018 – more than any other industry – largely in response to rapid growth in the elderly population. (Blame the baby boomers, who are getting up in age, and advances in medical technology.) Over



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this period, total employment of home-health aides is projected to increase by 50%, medical assistants by 34%, physical therapist assistants by 33% and physician assistants by 39%.

The bottom line: While many industries in America have a wealth of job candidates to pick from right now, the health-care industry is facing a talent shortage that only promises to get worse. Industry-wide shortages create possibilities for delivering substandard, even dangerous, care to patients and lead to a work environment that is not conducive to retaining the most qualified workers. So what are health-care companies to do? Build and maintain a culture that employees want to remain a part of for years to come. Here are three examples of organizations that have done just that.

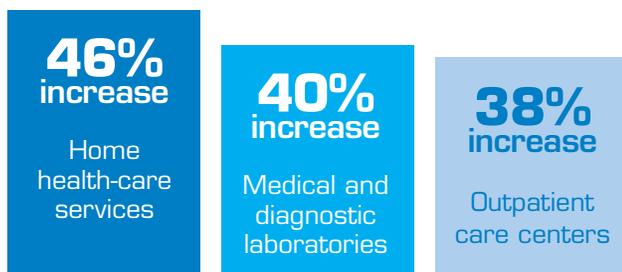
## START YOUR ENGINES

When two people meet in Los Angeles, the first thing they ask each other is, “What do you drive?” It’s a very car-centered culture, and residents know that commuting is required pretty much everywhere you work. One hospital in Hollywood recently used this fact to its advantage.

K. Pearson Brown, director and acting general manager of the Beverly Hills branch of national PR firm Steinreich Communications, credits the CEO of the hospital for the original campaign idea. “The hospital said to us, ‘We need to get nurses here. What can we do?’” says Brown. “And the CEO, who used to work for this hot-shot agency in Silicon Valley, said that when they were trying to recruit young talent, they offered them free cars.”

# 320,000

That’s the expected annual number of job openings in the health-care industry for the next eight years. The facilities that are expected to see the most job growth are:



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

And so the seed was planted. Brown and her team created a campaign with the goal of getting 100 nurses in 100 days by offering them a paid two-year car lease if they signed a one-year contract with the hospital. The campaign kicked off with an open-house event at the hospital, allowing interested nurses to browse the facility, chat with administrators, doctors and other staff members, and have a chance to drive home in a new car. “We sent out direct mail invitations to a list of hundreds of potential candidate nurses that the hospital came up with from *Nurse Week* magazine and other nursing organizations,” Brown says. “The invitations were giant cardboard keys and they opened up to read, ‘Come to the open house, pick up your key and you could walk away with a car.’”

Cars were provided by Executive Auto Leasing, balloons were everywhere and a live radio broadcast encouraged people to come. Over 300 people crowded into the hospital’s facilities, and each person received a key to try in the cars. “It looked like a car lot, because everyone was in the cars and kicking the tires and the balloons were out in the front,” says Brown. “One person won a one-month lease on a car that day and they actually didn’t have to sign a contract. That one-day promotion was just to get people there and interested in the job and the deal they could get if they signed a one-year employment contract.”

Steinreich Communications also launched a billboard ad to bring attention to the campaign, complete with an attractive woman in pearls with her well-manicured hand on the leather-wrapped stick shift of an expensive car. It read, “Our nurses love their shifts. Free cars for new nurses” and had the Web address for people who wanted to check it out. “Some local TV stations actually covered it and the *Los Angeles Business Journal* did a story on it,” says Brown. “The campaign was a hit.”

The hospital reached its goal of 100 nurses in just 30 days. “They got so many nurses,” Brown says. “They had a hotline that you could call for employees, and they were getting about a call per day before this – then after this campaign they were getting 60 calls per day. They were absolutely thrilled.”

## LISTEN UP!

Wayne Weiner, co-founder of Bella Business Solutions and a 15-year veteran of human resource management and professional recruitment, has made attracting nurses his business. He’s worked with numerous hospitals, including Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center, New England Baptist Hospital and Harvard Teaching Hospitals, and has learned that asking people what they’re looking for is an important step in creating promotions and rewards programs for the health-care industry.

Recently, when working with a large teaching hospital in Boston that was trying to hire experienced nurses, Weiner decided to explore why several nurses had left the facility in the past three years – and what it would take to get them back. “I called each of the nurses who had left within that time frame and asked why they left, if they would ever be interested

in returning and what we would need to do to bring them back,” Weiner says. “It’s amazing—sometimes when you ask questions, you get answers.”

The nurses expressed their concerns and what they would want to see changed before they could agree to return: more communication between the supervisors and the nurses, tighter ties with human resources so they could talk about unplanned time off, seniority benefits for more experienced nurses, and job security if they were to leave for more schooling and come back. “We worked with human resources, and were able to make all of these concessions,” Weiner says. Plus, he sweetened the pot by sending all of the nurses Cool Cloths (a product that wicks away moisture from the skin and keeps users feeling fresh) with the hospital’s logo on it, and thanked them for their input.

The result? “We got all 15 nurses back and each of them is still working at that hospital,” Weiner says. The key to winning back employees (and keeping the ones you have), he says, is to show you’re really listening to their needs. “If you don’t listen, you end up giving them something they don’t want,” he says.

In one case, Weiner was working with a medical device company in western Massachusetts. When his team asked employees what they would want as part of a small rewards program, they said they wanted to bring their pets into work. The response was unexpected, but the company said OK. “It was a non-patient area and sure enough, we fulfilled their requests and they brought their pets in. People were really, really happy,” he says.

## SHOW APPRECIATION

Recruitment in the senior-care industry is a nonstop process. Because the patients’ needs are ever-changing, the care they require differs day to day, and staffers who are qualified one day may not be fit for the job the next. When patients are discharged from hospitals on short notice, they need a certified at-home care team—fast. When someone is admitted who is suffering from memory loss, they need a certified nursing assistant (CNA) who knows how to deal with the side effects and the symptoms. “There are a lot of little things in caring for seniors,” says Julie Northcutt, CEO of Caregiverlist Inc. “The water temperature of a bath, how to deal with the emotional side of the job, what to do if a senior is resisting care that they need, Alzheimer’s memory loss, Lewy body memory loss and hallucinations—CNAs have to learn a lot of stuff.”

CNAs do vital, hands-on work, but almost never get much respect due to the fact that they hold junior positions. Caregiverlist Inc. has been proactive in changing this inequity, and hopes to produce a steady flow of job applicants, boost retention rates and solidify staffs. With help from a promo products distributor, the company recently created a lapel pin that reads, ‘Caregiverlist Certified Training,’ which is given to people who complete the company’s 10-hour training programs. “There are a lot of different recognitions and associations for higher-level employees, but the lower-level nurses don’t have anything,”

## Help Wanted

Here are 10 smart tactics health-care organizations are using to find nurses. All can be used to recruit practically any hard-to-find worker.

**1. Revisit interviewees.** Research former interviewees who turned down your job offer and ask them why they made the decision they did. Consider their suggestions and tweak your offer to be more appealing.

**2. Leverage the CEO.** Potential staffers love to hear how much they’re wanted. Have the CEO call employees-to-be and tell them that he or she is really looking forward to the prospect of having them on the team.

**3. Select a hiring team.** Not all managers are good at seeking out qualified candidates. Identify the nurses who are good recruiters and assign them to do most of the hiring. Give them an incentive for each person they hire.

**4. Invite friends.** Hold an open house at your facility and encourage current nurses to bring their fellow nursing friends in for a tour.

**5. Create a contest.** Design a friendly referral competition among current nurses. Offer a prize for the nurse who brings in the most qualified candidates.

**6. Offer high-level benefits.** Many nurses are wary of leaving their current facility, even if they want to. Offer the top candidates on your list shift choices, flexibility and other perks so they know they will not be starting from square one if they join your team.

**7. Get on-campus help.** Ask part-time or temporary college interns to serve as recruiting reps when they head back to campus. Ask them to attend nursing-related events (even if held by other companies) and scope out exceptional candidates.

**8. Network with nursing schools.** Use local college professors as referral sources. They can easily identify the most promising students coming out of their programs.

**9. Offer incentives for interviewing.** Give well-qualified candidates a reason to schedule an interview by offering a free lunch and an incentive (such as high-end scrubs or an attractive bag).

**10. Utilize social events.** Find out what types of social events nurses regularly attend and set up a booth to soft-sell your company.

*Source: John Sullivan, Ph.D., professor of management at San Francisco State University*

Northcutt says. “It gives these workers something to be proud of.”

Caregiverlist Inc. also hosts “Care for the Caregiver” days that are open to interested applicants. These events are held to promote the company offline and certify more nurses, so staffing is made easier nationwide. People can get their training and mingle at the event. After it’s over, attendees are put into the Caregiverlist online system so employers can contact them. “We do different training modules, give out free lunch, massages, T-shirts, and at the end of the day, if you pass the training modules, you get the lapel pin,” Northcutt says. “Not only do we find applicants this way, but it strengthens our brand awareness.”

The company started the program just last October and has already had great feedback from the CNAs and the companies that use the website as a hiring tool. “People love it,” Northcutt says. “It really does fill a void and it makes the certified nursing aides feel good. They have the toughest job and they deserve the appreciation.”

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