

Advice That Pays



When it comes to negotiating salary, employers and supervisors say, PTs and PTAs should speak confidently and carry a big list—of why they're worth the money.

by Eric Ries



"There are things like tuition reimbursement, continuing education dollars, and paid membership in APTA that we can offer [when salary increases aren't feasible]. We have a part-time employee with 5 children to whom we give a monthly child care benefit. We offer flexible hours to someone else who works a split shift, which gives her afternoons off to do things with her family. ... You've got to be fair about it, but there are a lot of different, creative things that an employer can do." —Susan Davis, PT

As Susan Davis, PT, notes, however, there are times when the money simply isn't there for a salary increase—as much as the employee might merit one, and as much as the employer would like to discourage the staff member from scanning the classified ads. In such cases, practices and facilities still have a number of potentially persuasive arrows in their quiver, she says.

"There are things like tuition reimbursement, continuing education dollars, and paid membership in APTA that we can offer," says Davis, principal partner of Marlboro Physical Therapy, which has locations in Marlboro and Old Bridge, New Jersey. "We have a part-time employee with 5 children to whom we give a monthly child care benefit. We offer flexible hours to someone else who works a split shift, which gives her afternoons off to do things with her family. We've done a partial insurance reimbursement for a senior PT who wanted to add family members to her health insurance. You've got to be fair about it, but there are a lot of different, creative things that an employer can do." She's heard, Davis adds, that another physical therapy practice in her area may soon offer staff members the incentive of weekends at a beach condominium that the practice owns.

Employers also might consider offering staff opportunities to teach educational seminars for PTs, PTAs, and other audiences, says Carruthers. "That's something employ-

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ers don't always think about," she notes. "The employer advertises the seminar, people pay to attend, and the seminar leader has a chance to make some extra money."

But non-salary incentives to keep veteran employees happy needn't always have significant monetary value. Rich's company instituted a "core values" program that encourages staff members to record, in writing, instances in which their co-workers exemplify such core company values as integrity, compassion, and teamwork. A committee selects winners, who are feted at quarterly meetings with a certificate and inexpensive gifts. Rich herself once was awarded popcorn, candy bars, and a couple of movie tickets.

"Salary is important, but I believe that most PTs also strongly value autonomy, clinical growth, and a supportive environment," she says. Members of her staff, Rich notes, "design their own schedules every day," and know that "if you want to start something here that would fill an unmet need and is financially do-able, we will support you, give you the resources you need, and expect you to take it and run with it."

Davis says she emphasizes the value of a supportive environment in her salary negotiations with staff.

"If I feel like I've done as much as I can for someone, financially and benefit-wise, I really try to emphasize the worth of our workplace," she says. "I'll stress the value of working with excellent equipment and having interesting caseloads—and the fact that here, we schedule no more than one patient every 30 minutes. I'll make the point that our PTs have more time to meet patient needs than do PTs at a lot of private practices—but that the flip side of that is that we're not making as much money to pass along to them."

"That's kind of my last shot," Davis says. "But I do feel that our PTs really should appreciate and value the advantages here for PTs and patient care." ■

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