

Desirable Qualities in an Associate

There are definite differences between an associate and a partner. An associate is hired to provide clinical services, but may be uninvolved in practice management. Once the associate begins to buy into the practice, he/she becomes a partner, a financial and, perhaps, management commitment that is much greater than that of an associate.

Senior doctors who contemplate bringing in an associate may wish to have the candidate tested psychologically to make four determinations:

1. Is there satisfactory interpersonal compatibility? Do the two doctors have similar interests, standards, and senses of humor? Are they sensitive to staff members; respectful of patients; able to work well with diverse types of people and each other?
2. Is the level of dominance or aggression of the entering doctor acceptable to the senior? Is the young doctor so aggressive that he/she will overpower or alienate the senior? Or is he/she so docile and unassertive that he/she will be unable to keep the practice healthy when the senior departs.
3. Does the young doctor have a high sense of integrity? Can you rely on his/her word? Is his/her word as important, or perhaps more important, than a contract might be? While a contract is necessary; the probability of adherence to conditions in a contract without a legal battle should a split occur must be considered.
4. Does the prospective partner have a strong work ethic? Is he/she "hungry"? Is he/she willing to work extended hours, take call, limit vacation? A successful doctor knows that when the door is closed at night the problems of the practice do not disappear. He/she takes them home; he/she worries about them; he/she works on their resolution; he/she plans for future development; he/she often carries home a briefcase and devotes some hours of thought or actual work to the improved management of the practice. Will the prospective associate be able to work at such a level?

Perhaps a key word in choosing the right associate is continuity. After a dynamic leader reduces work load or retires, the level of enthusiasm and excellence that the senior initiated during earlier years will have to be maintained. Can an associate who is to become a partner continue and even enhance all that has been built?