



Listening to patients -- and employees

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Quick Summary

Audiologists Amy Sapodin and Alison Hoffmann say having their own business gives them freedom to offer services that help clients.



Photo credit: Karen Wiles Stabile | Audiologists Amy Sapodin, left, and Alison Hoffmann are partners in Advanced Hearing Center of Albertson and Floral Park. (Feb. 24, 2010)

Audiologists Alison Hoffmann and Amy Sapodin say opening their own practice in 2002 to help those with hearing impairments and other ear-related problems has given them the freedom to provide extra services such as a group rehabilitation workshop and training on new devices.

"There's no money to be made in those things," says Sapodin, but the outreach pays off when satisfied clients generate new business through word of mouth.

Sapodin, 43, a mother of two, handles most of the business, bookkeeping and computer support for the practice. Hoffmann, 40, takes care of public relations, outreach and presentations. She is married and has three children.

Both see patients.

How do you motivate employees during an economic downturn?

"We motivate them through salary and bonuses -- and a very positive work environment," Hoffmann said. She cited weekly staff development meetings at which workers are "verbally recognized for all their accomplishments and achievements."

Sapodin says patients express their appreciation for staff who "go the extra mile for them. We've been lucky in finding people that are willing to do that, and enjoy doing that and get satisfaction within themselves in doing those things. Even though the economy has gone down, we grew last year, actually."

Added Hoffmann: "We're a team. We treat our employees as owners almost, with the business, where they're taking ownership for their actions and the results and the business being profitable. We all participate in all activities, [even] taking out the garbage - so nothing's too big or too small of a job."

What do you look for when hiring?

Hoffmann says a candidate for "a front-office position, where they're on the phone with patients, has to be a very compassionate and empathetic type of personality. Any of our employees who are going to have direct involvement with patients -- our primary concern is their compassion and interest in helping others."

Sapodin adds, "Because if they can't get past the front door, then we can't help them." She says prospective employees take a "strength-finder test" that helps match candidates with positions.

How do you get employee feedback?

"We have an outside organization that we work with that spends one to two days a year with each of the employees, off site, often, where we have them discuss how things are going -- well, or not well -- and areas that they see [where] improvements can be made," Sapodin says. "Then we meet with the person, and they give their feedback and suggestions. There are certain things that they've felt more comfortable saying to somebody else than maybe they would certain things that they've felt more comfortable saying to somebody else than maybe they would have to us."

What lessons have you learned about leadership?

"You must be an active manager," Sapodin says. "We're always observing and analyzing what they're doing, making sure that they're answering the questions the way that we feel is best understood by the patient."

Corporate snapshot

Names. Alison Hoffmann and Amy Sapodin.

Titles. Partners and doctors of audiology.

Company. Advanced Hearing Center.

Business. Treating hearing loss and tinnitus.

Locations. Albertson and Floral Park.

Type. Private company.

Employees. 7