

# The Right Tools for the Career

*Using technology to motivate and retain technical staff*

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**I**nnovation is part of our DNA at St. Luke's Cataract & Laser Institute. Our founder, James Gills, MD, continually drew inspiration from others, while adding his own techniques, to achieve better outcomes for our patients. Today, Pit Gills, MD, with his own passion for innovation, leads our practice, where technological advances are an important part of our culture.

We recognize that technology is a driving force in ophthalmology. That said, we don't aim to be an early adopter for the sake of being first. Instead, we implement technologies that have a proven positive impact on clinical outcomes and patient satisfaction. They also have to make financial sense for the practice.

During the past 5 years, we've incorporated a flood of new technology throughout the practice, from the front desk to the ASC. In addition to benefitting patients, we believe that creating a culture that embraces change and enhancements in patient care makes a powerful statement to our employees.

So, rather than looking at our investment purely from the patients' and surgeons' points of view, we view these investments as a way to attract and retain good technicians. Could this make a significant impact on staff recruitment and retention? The simple answer is "yes."

New technicians want to work in a high-tech setting.

At St. Luke's, we have worked hard to leverage technology to validate and outline our technicians' career paths rather than simply place them in jobs.

## **What's in It for Them?**

With so few experienced technicians in the job market, new technician hires at St. Luke's, like many practices, rarely have previous experience in the field. We've found that college graduates with a solid academic record, but who have not yet chosen a path, are primed for learning and motivated to connect with a particular field and identify a career path.

Because many candidates aren't familiar with the role of the ophthalmic technician, we have to work even harder during the interview to identify those who could be a good fit. It is helpful for technician candidates to tour our practice and experience firsthand the level of responsibility that comes with the role. When applicants see our staff working one-on-one with patients and using cutting-edge equipment, they understand that we invest in technology — and they quickly appreciate that we make a long-term investment in our employees.

Our staff members consider it a privilege when they are selected to train for advanced responsibilities, such as retinal imaging, biometry, topography, and refractive testing. We believe that investing in our staff far beyond "pushing

buttons” enhances retention, and it also has a significant impact on our patients’ outcomes and experiences.

We have found that several key elements are important for retention:

- **Contributing to patient outcomes.** We put high-tech equipment in our technicians’ hands and train them to deliver the accurate results our physicians and patients need. Our team understands that our doctors are counting on accuracy and precision to make the best decisions for our patients. We work hard to connect the dots for staff so they truly appreciate the impact they have on patient care. When they understand their contribution to the patient, they become more engaged with their work and the practice.

- **Envisioning a solid career path.** As our technicians learn about their role in patient care and receive validation from physicians and patients, they begin to see the value and credibility in what they’re doing. We help them understand that achieving excellence in their role will lead to opportunities to expand their expertise and advance in the practice.

- **Improving skills and status.** We provide our technicians many opportunities to “specialize” and develop in-depth skill sets. One example is the training program we’ve developed with Marco for the EPIC® Refractive Workstation. Although portions of the Epic system are automated, it’s not a “see one, do one, teach one” technology. Because we use the Epic as part of our biometry process, our Epic technicians must have critical-thinking skills and understand what the numbers and topography images mean.

Our ideal Epic trainees are naturally curious and analytical. They are fully invested in producing accurate measurements. It’s a prestigious accomplishment in our practice to be selected for Epic training, and our techs are very proud to be chosen. After attending a 2-day training session at Marco’s headquarters, they return to us enthusiastic and engaged. When a patient hits the target refraction after cataract surgery, our Epic team knows that their topography measurements were an integral component of the lens selection process.

- **Plentiful education opportunities.** As recent college graduates, our newer technicians know from personal experience how expensive education is, and they appreciate the value and investment we make in their training.

We continually train our entire staff in house through our own continuing education programs, clinical rotations, and hands-on training. Physician engagement and support of staff are also critical elements.

## Expectations & Encouragement

The shortage of experienced technicians has forced us to develop our own training program, and retention of our new technician trainees is challenging. The process begins during the interview, when we must educate applicants on the ophthalmic technician’s career path. We must get their commitment and buy-in during the interview before we commit to invest in training them from the ground up.

Technician turnover usually happens because we took a chance on someone with no experience, and that person decided to do something entirely different. Our goal is to reduce this scenario as much as possible by educating applicants about what to expect.

When we find people who thrive in their jobs, we owe it to them and to the practice to give them opportunities to grow. By using new technology, investing in their future, and supporting them with a collaborative and innovative culture, we develop connected, engaged technicians who have exciting and promising careers. ●

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