

Have you tried retention marketing?

Michelle Abdow explains to Alan Hosking how employer branding can actually bring healthcare workers back.



FROM THE US

PROFILE

MICHELLE ABDOW is the President and CEO of Market Mentors in West Palm Beach Florida, US.

time, bad debt and charity care have stayed elevated, which puts even more strain on operating margins.

That environment hits healthcare workers differently than employees in most other industries. Clinicians are not just managing deadlines. They are making high-stakes decisions for sick, anxious and often frustrated patients while moving through short staffing, documentation burden and emotional fatigue. When people leave, organizations lose experience, continuity of care and the return on every recruitment dollar spent to bring that person in.

What makes healthcare burnout different from stress in other sectors?

In healthcare, unmanaged workplace stress carries emotional, operational and patient-care consequences at the same time. A nurse or physician can't simply postpone the work because volume is high. Patients still need care, families still need answers and teams still need coverage.

That's what makes this category different. The strain is constant and personal. It comes from caring for more complex patients, covering open shifts, working through documentation requirements and dealing with payer obstacles that slow care down. According to the AHA, administrative burden remains a top contributor to clinician burnout, and nearly 90% of physicians report that prior authorization increases burnout.

So, when healthcare leaders talk about retention, they have to recognize that this is a workforce stability issue tied directly to patient access, quality and financial performance.

Where does employer branding fit into that picture?

Employer branding matters because healthcare organizations cannot recruit their way out of

a retention problem. If the internal experience does not support the reality of frontline work, new hires will leave and experienced staff will disengage.

In healthcare, employer brand has to prove that the organization understands what employees are carrying. That means acknowledging workload, being honest about challenges and showing how leadership is reducing friction where it can.

A strong employer brand in this environment tells employees, "We know the work is hard. We are not pretending otherwise. Here is how we support you, how we communicate and why staying here is different." That kind of clarity matters when workers are exhausted and deciding whether they can keep going.

What do you mean by retention marketing for healthcare workers?

Retention marketing is the disciplined use of internal communication to keep employees connected to purpose, culture and value after they're hired. In healthcare, that means reinforcing mission in a way that respects the reality of the work.

Too often, organizations put their best language into recruiting campaigns and then switch to purely transactional communication once someone joins. But healthcare workers need more than schedules and policy updates. They need consistent reminders that their work matters, that leadership sees the strain and that the organization is actively trying to reduce unnecessary burden.

That can include visible recognition, stronger manager communication, storytelling tied to patient impact and clear updates on changes that affect workload. In a strained healthcare environment, retention marketing helps prevent employees from feeling like they are carrying the mission alone.

How can brand strategy help improve retention when the real issues are staffing and workload?

Brand strategy does not replace staffing solutions. It strengthens them.

When staffing is tight, every point of friction matters more. Confusing communication, weak

leadership visibility, inconsistent culture and hollow messaging make a hard job feel harder. Brand strategy helps remove some of that friction by aligning what leadership says with what employees experience.

It also helps organizations define the behaviors and values they want managers to reinforce every day. In healthcare, culture often breaks down at the unit level. If leaders say the organization values teamwork, respect and support, employees need to feel that in scheduling, recognition, communication and accountability.

In short, brand strategy helps create a work environment that people can tolerate longer and believe in more deeply, even in a difficult labor market.

Why isn't compensation enough to solve this?

Because healthcare burnout is not driven by pay alone. Compensation does not erase exhaustion, understaffing, patient aggression, moral distress or the frustration of spending more time on administrative tasks and less time with patients. The AHA's 2026 environmental scan notes that 39% of physicians say they spend less time with patients and more time on administrative tasks than they did five years ago, and 57% see administrative burden as a major area of opportunity for improvement.

If an organization raises wages but leaves the daily experience untouched, retention gains may be short-lived. People still leave when they feel depleted, unsupported or unable to do the work the way they believe it should be done.

How should healthcare organizations re-engage clinicians who stepped away because of burnout?

First, they need credibility. That means being specific. Have staffing models improved? Has leadership reduced unnecessary administrative burden? Are managers better trained? Is scheduling more flexible? Are there realistic re-entry options for experienced professionals who do not want to come back full-time?

The message has to acknowledge the strain that pushed people out in the first place. In healthcare, re-engagement only works when the

WHY IS RETENTION SUCH AN URGENT ISSUE FOR HEALTHCARE ORGANIZATIONS RIGHT NOW?

Because healthcare isn't operating under ordinary workplace pressure. Hospitals, health systems and care facilities are trying to manage high patient volumes, rising acuity, staffing gaps, reimbursement pressure and heavier administrative demands all at once. Recent hospital data shows inpatient volumes rose in 2025 while labor expense remained one of the biggest financial challenges. At the same



EP 47

Laura Maffucci

VP, Head of Human Resources

G-P

In this episode, Laura breaks down why modern leadership requires a radical shift toward authenticity, empathy, and reimagining how work actually gets done.

We explore the hidden toll of AI "bolting" on employee burnout, and why treating artificial intelligence like a brilliant but junior intern requires more human coaching and discernment than senior executives realize.

Discover how HR leaders can move past corporate jargon to build cultures from the top down, ensuring that in an era of rapid technological change, we never underestimate the human element on the ground.

[Click here to listen to this episode!](#)

brand promise is grounded in operational reality.

How does this protect recruitment ROI?

Every healthcare organization is spending heavily to attract talent into one of the most difficult labor markets in the country. If turnover remains high, those dollars are constantly being recycled into replacement hiring instead of workforce stability.

Retention protects that investment. It reduces repeat recruitment costs, preserves institutional knowledge and supports continuity of care. It also improves the credibility of your recruitment message because current employees become more believable advocates when their experience matches what the organization says externally.

That is especially important now. Workforce scans from the AHA show burnout, vacancies and administrative burden remain top concerns, and the NSI calculates that every 1% change in registered nurse turnover can cost or save the average hospital hundreds of thousands of dollars annually.

What should healthcare decision makers do first?

Start by looking honestly at the gap between your recruiting message and your employee reality. Then focus on three things: reduce avoidable friction, strengthen internal communication and make support visible.

In healthcare, retention improves when employees believe leadership understands the pressure they are under and is actively working to make the environment more sustainable. That does not mean pretending the job is easy. It means proving the organization is serious about helping people stay.

What's the bottom line?

In healthcare, retention is not just a hiring issue. It is a patient care issue, a financial issue and a brand issue.

When organizations ignore the daily strain on clinicians, recruitment investments erode quickly. When they use brand strategy and internal marketing to reinforce mission, reduce disconnect and rebuild trust, they give people a stronger reason to stay in an industry asking a lot of them right now. ■