

Hiring Tips for Dentists



By Linda Miles

So many young dentists are at a loss when it comes to hiring, training, motivating, and retaining employees. This article will hopefully answer some questions as well as offer timely tips for those who have staff or need to add additional team members.

Where do you find good people?

You don't find them, you create them.

While skills are important, they are second to personal traits that are more important. I always look for attitude, personality, and image. The skills can be learned but it is very difficult to "change the stripes on a tiger" if the attitude is negative, few people skills are present, or there is a lack of neat appearance. It is a known fact that happy people produce more than unhappy folks produce. Since dentistry is a people business, hiring people who do not like interacting with people is a huge mistake. You can send someone to an image consultant and re-dress them but some people do not value a professional image. This is not good in a care-giving profession, as it's perceived the way a person takes care of him/herself is the way they will take care of others. To me this is basic and very important to the hiring process. It amazes me how improperly some people dress for professional interviews and basically ruin their chances of a second interview.

Besides skills such as dental business or clinical, the employer or prospective employer needs to assess their own leadership skills to determine whether they will have total success in the hiring process. Are you a positive role model to

the people you wish to surround yourself with? Employees will take on the same traits as their leaders.

I have personally met staff who were 4's on a scale of 1-10, with ten being the best. These staff members worked in a negative work environment with a negative boss and co-workers. They had jobs, not careers. They were not properly trained, were criticized in front of their patients and co-workers, never felt appreciated, and disliked going to work. I have seen these same people leave one office for another and become 12's on a scale of 1-10. The only things that changed were the environment, boss, and co-workers. Doctors cannot always motivate their own employees but they MUST create an environment of self-motivation, which is a participative versus dictatorial management style. Employees must be trained, trusted, praised, and appreciated. They must have opportunities for continuing education and challenged to move themselves and the practice to a higher level each year. They must feel their idea will be heard and sometimes implemented. They must know they are in a safe and open environment with lines of communication open to all team members. Then and only then will you have created the cream of the crop employees who will go the extra mile for the patients, practice, employer, and co-workers.

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How do I attract applicants to my office? I've tried newspaper ads with little success.

While many dentists today use online sites to find employees, you can also get many non-qualified applicants who waste your time. I highly recommend asking your local dental sales representatives and other dentists in the community at dental meetings. The local dental assistant/hygiene associations often have employment chairpersons keeping a log of those looking for positions or those seeking new staff. You may also use a placement agency, many of which do the initial screening for you. Some dentists contact other dentists with current help wanted ads. If they have finished interviewing and had more than one qualified applicant, they may be willing to share those names and numbers, especially if the requesting dentist offers to pay for the ad. (It's a good idea to get permission from the applicant first.)

Check your local and state dental assisting and hygiene schools. Look to your team and ask if they know of anyone who may be a good candidate. Some offices have had outstanding results when hiring patients to join their team. It's better than hiring a stranger. One of my clients sits down with his team and asks them to write down all the personal traits they want the new hire to have. Then they write names of people they know that may fit the qualifications. If the dentist hires someone recommended by a staff member, the staff member receives a \$400 recruitment bonus after the 90-day trial employment. It's a great reward to the recommender and far less expensive than the ads and time involved in interviewing. Also, the staff member who helps find this person is much more likely to welcome them with open arms. It's more effective than the doctor doing all the hiring and saying, "Oh, by the way I spent Saturday morning interviewing and your new co-worker will be here next Monday."

How do I orient new employees to my practice?

It's a good idea to have a week or two of orientation. Assign the new hire to a buddy. This person is their contact for all questions and all training during the orientation. The buddy takes them to lunch, shows them where to keep personal belongings, goes over the office manual with them, does hands on training (if warranted), and answers simple questions such as how the microwave works. This gives new members on the team a connection and makes them feel as though the red carpet has been rolled out to meet them. It beats training through osmosis, i.e. "Just watch us and eventually you'll get the hang of how we do things here."

How do I keep my staff happy and challenged?

Some people believe money is the only motivator. While money is important to all workers, at the top of the list of what employees value most is APPRECIATION. Since dentistry is a female dominated work place, both male and female employers need to know that females are born caregivers who love responsibility, recognition, rewards, and respect. I call these the 4 R's of motivation. Praise in front of patients and co-workers is like water and sunshine, it makes the human being grow.

Staff and doctor incentives are great. Incentive bonus plan failures happen when the goals are reached but the business owner isn't very happy when the bonus checks are written and dispensed. That attitude actually de-motivates! Bonus plans must be simple and fair to patients, the practice as a business, the doctors, and the team. Bonuses must also be the same for all employees. Their salaries are personal and based on their personal worth to the practice. In order for the team bonus plan to work, all staff who work the same number of hours should be awarded the same bonus amount. Part-timers should be prorated. Individual bonuses create staff competition and jealousy, which in my opinion is worse than having no plan. Also remember how important respect is. You must give respect in order to have it returned. The team will treat your patients EXACTLY the way the doctor(s) and upper management treats them. Trust breeds loyalty.

Why is the turnover rate so high after a new dentist takes over?

It is a known fact among management consultants that the attrition rate of previous staff is usually high after the new dentist takes over. There are many reasons for this:

- The new dentist may not be able to continue to employ the long-term team members whose salaries make staff salary percentages on the profit and loss statement more than 30%. While I believe long-term staff members are worth their weight in gold to a new dentist, if the production does not increase to get the higher salaries into a more comfortable level within 6 months, the new dentist has no alternative except to hire others willing to take a lesser pay or benefit package. I do not necessarily advocate this option but we must face reality in some practices.
- If team members had deep rooted loyalty to the departed employer and nothing the new dentist says or does pleases them, they must be replaced by positive people who realize the new doctor needs the staff's full support. If team members value their careers, they must adapt to these changes and adopt the new owner, giving him/her full support and endorsement. Patients quickly pick up on negative vibes. I've seen new dentists lose patients because staff members were actually de-marketing them and their dentistry to the patients by their lack of enthusiasm for these changes.

Hopefully by addressing these hiring issues, the future of hiring will be easier and more productive.



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