



TIPS FOR HIRING NEW TEAM MEMBERS

by Christine Schlenker

You've hung up your shingle, set up your operatory, hooked up your phone, and placed that marketing ad. You're ready to open your doors ... but wait! You'll need to hire a team member or two, but where do you begin? You've heard horror stories from other dentists in your study club; good team members are hard to find.

Step by step

Relax. It's not as hard as you think. Before even placing your ad, you should create the position and outline your expectations. Select a job title and write a job description to match. Create a daily checklist so your new staff member is clear on the position's duties. The correct forms then need to be signed and the manual should be reviewed. These tools start the employer/employee relationship out right.

It may sound like a lot of work, but it's important to start the hiring process with your expectations clearly outlined and stated. Often we hire team members based on their likability or the information on their résumés, only to be disappointed later. This is why you need to start with a job description.

Now it's time to place the ad. You can advertise on many online job-posting sites like Craigslist, Dentalpost.net, Indeed.com or even your local newspaper. Find out which one works best for your area,

and keep the ad simple. List the position, location and the working hours.

You also may want to add some instructions to follow. For example, you can request that applicants send a cover letter or answer a specific question, to see if they can follow simple instructions.

Another way to find good team members is to keep your eyes open when you are out and about. Wait staff, bank tellers and baristas all require good customer-service skills. Keep your eyes open for that shining star and ask if he or she has ever thought about a new career (of course, this depends on the position and the licensing requirements of your state).

Contacting local dental schools is another way to find team members who are eager to begin their careers. Newly graduated employees may need a little extra training, but what a great opportunity to mentor someone. (It's also nice to not have to break any bad habits.) The more ways you get the word out that you are looking to hire, the better the chances you'll find a good fit.

Face to face

Now that you've lined up some interviews, how do you find that good match? A variety of methods can help you choose wisely. You could start with a phone interview. Take a few minutes to chat about

the position and decide if you would like to interview the candidate in person. You can often tell a lot about how an applicant feels about the position just by listening to her tone of voice.

A group interview is another well-proven method. Review the résumés and invite the candidates to your office on a specific date and time. Yes, all at the same time. The group dynamics and verbal skills can all be tested at once. If they can't be nice to each other as total strangers, how will they meet and greet the patients who are your most valuable resource? (To find out more about this method, contact Sandy Pardue at Classic Practice Resources.)

The one-on-one appointment is the most common interviewing method. If a candidate doesn't show, consider it a blessing in disguise and move on.

When interviewing in person, use visual cues as well as your ears to gauge whether someone is right for the job. People often are nervous during an interview; this can come out in many forms. If a candidate is talking too fast or fidgeting, it may not be her usual personality, but this can be a clue that she is not as confident as you may think.

Rely on more than your gut to decide if a candidate is right for the job. He may be a likable person, but if he can't even pour up a model, it will have an effect on the entire team. A personality test can be useful as well. You can use DISC, or something comparable.

You could also create a written skills test. Ask three or four questions that pertain to the position, such as, "What would you say when ... ?" or, "Calculate the patient's

out-of-pocket copayment for this treatment estimate." After the verbal interview, ask the candidate to complete this simple test and step away to give him time. The test helps you gauge his skill level, and you can also check his reaction when asked to take a quiz—how will he react to accountability of daily tasks? Note how long it takes each candidate to complete the quiz.

Always have potential hires fill out an employment application in addition to providing a résumé. The application will give you the information you'll need when you hire. It is also a great way to check an applicant's handwriting.

Eye to eye

Once you have decided on a candidate, ask her to come back for a second interview to spend time with your team to make sure she will fit in and that your team will be welcoming. Patients quickly pick up on negativity between team members, so it's important that everyone gets along and behaves professionally.

You can also have your candidate perform a half- or full-day working interview. This can show you how he will mesh with the team and handle himself in a new situation. When considering a working interview, the question of whether or not to pay comes into play.

Check your state's guidelines, but keep in mind what is fair. If patients are paying for the cleaning they're receiving from this candidate, doesn't it seem fair that you should pay the person performing the service? Check with your human-resources company to find out how best to handle working interviews.

Require all candidates to provide references so you can check past job experiences. In the case of personal references, ask the candidate to explain why each one will be a good judge of his or her character, so you won't find out later that you accepted validation from a candidate's boyfriend or girlfriend.

Pen to paper

Now that you have interviewed and checked references, it's time to make a decision. You can offer the position in a variety of ways: in person, or via phone or email. However, notifying the candidate in person is best.

Put your offer in writing so the terms are clearly understood. Provide your new staff member with a job description and the necessary employment forms. This gives her time to take them home and have them ready for her first day. Tell her how to enter your building and what to expect when she arrives.

Hiring new team members can be challenging, and you will definitely make some mistakes. You may hire someone who, in the long run, just isn't a good match. It happens to us all. Make the decision quickly and make a change—try to do this during the initial 90-day probationary period. If necessary, you can find out if one of the other candidates is still available, to make replacing your initial hire less painful.

If you hire carefully and take your time to find the perfect match, you should be just fine. With a strong team in place, you will be on your way to building a successful and happy practice! ■

How do you handle filling positions in your practice? Comment on this article at Dentaltown.com/magazine.aspx

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