



In Practice

WITH DR. RONALD GOLDSTEIN

How to Retain Staff and Keep Them Motivated

Hiring quality staff can be one of the most stressful tasks for a dentist or office manager to do. It is often one of the most repeated topics during practice management seminars. There is little doubt that, if you are successful in this process, you and your dental staff will have more pleasant, rewarding, and productive attitudes. Yet, the secret to hiring the right individuals still seems to be a mystery to many clinicians.

It does not have to be. By following some basic guidelines, such those advised by management consultant and former VISA International CEO Dee Hock,¹ the success rate of hiring quality staff and retaining them can be very high. Following some of Dee Hock's management suggestions will not guarantee the perfect result, but you may begin to recognize some of your not-so-good choices and keep those in mind when you consider an individual for a position. You can learn a lot and avoid making that same mistake again.

SIX KEYS TO HIRING LONG-TERM QUALITY STAFF

There is no concrete, step-by-step, faultless protocol for hiring

in any industry. Hiring the best individual for a position can be time-consuming and costly, but your approach can be streamlined if you have basic guidelines and a proven philosophy. First you must hire skillfully. Is there a magic formula for this? Yes, and no. Implementing Dee Hock's pearls of wisdom, your selection can be more successful and reliable. These include hiring first on the individual's integrity; second on motivation; third on capacity; fourth on understand-

ing; fifth on knowledge; and finally, last on experience.¹

INTEGRITY

First, look for steadfastness and a sound ethical code. During the interview, do you sense the candidate is being honest and upfront with you? You can perceive a person's character by investing sufficient time in the interview process. If you have already spoken to the candidate's previous employer(s), verify that work history (times, dates, and numbers) is consistent verbally with what you have in writing. Ask philosophical questions and

evaluate the candidate's perceptions. If he or she speaks negatively about a previous employer, shares inappropriate personal information about previous employers, or criticizes the employer's professional skills, this should be a warning sign you will want to note. Avoid judging someone who left a previous employer because of compensation issues, personal needs, or changes in the practice. You will want to hear what that employee requires.

indicators are a variety of certifications, continuing education, and pursuit of formal education



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The employee's ability to learn, understand, and apply their knowledge is far more important than focusing only on their previous experience.

MOTIVATION

Motivation can be described in the following terms: to provide with an incentive; move to action; impel. Motivation is a key element in the hiring process. Ask candidates what has motivated them to apply for a position at your practice and to leave another. You can accept an individual who may not have all the qualifications that you were looking for, but if you see that there has been advancement in their professional life, this may be an indication that this person moves forward and is motivated to progress. Some motivation

or a college degree. If the candidate has not pursued continued education, ask why not. Review the applicant's past employment records and see if he or she progressed along the way, and if not, why. An individual may lack experience, but with the drive to succeed, can achieve almost anything. Ask yourself the question, "What motivates this applicant?" It is very important to know what motivates your staff. However, keep in mind that motivation varies from person to person.

CAPACITY

The candidate's ability to receive, hold, and absorb information has to be determined. You should ask yourself, "Is the



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applicant going to add and support the staff or practice or will he or she diminish it? Is this person trainable and how much can

he/she absorb to become an asset?" There are many applicants with vast experience, but not all have the capacity to learn new tasks or techniques.

UNDERSTANDING

An applicant's ability to perceive and comprehend information is invaluable. Under-

standing will help achieve effective training and improve communication between patient relationships and staff relationships. Comprehension is not only the ability to follow instructions, but also involves listening skills that can either make for a great employee or hinder the ability to create a good working relationship. If you employ an individual who receives the communication but does not act on it, that employee will be useless in your office. Each office requires a different level of communication and understanding. You must determine the amount of interaction the employee will face, not only with the patient and dentist, but also with the staff and outside contacts, and assess whether a candidate seems capable of this.

KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge is power and con-

“Without integrity, motivation is dangerous; without motivation, capacity is impotent; without capacity, understanding is limited; without understanding, knowledge is meaningless; without knowledge, experience is blind.”

—Dee Hock,
Dee Hock on Management.

fidence. A new employee that has the ability to come in to an office and speak accurately to a patient about dentistry is a time and energy saver who accelerates the training curve. The information needed by an employee to interact with a patient is something that can be learned but often is difficult to teach.

EXPERIENCE

Experience can be defined as active participation in events or activities, leading to the accumulation of knowledge or skill. The first thing we often look at when someone applies for a position is his or her level of experience. We seem to believe that the “right” candidate is someone with expe-

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rience. Employers tend to look for a certain predetermined number of years of experience on an application to solve their employment problem. However, if the first thing you look for on an application is years of experience, you may be overlooking other superior candidates. Experience is a positive benefit, but should be weighed in degree of importance depending on the position's requirements and the ability to train in those requirements. If you are hiring a primary position, such as an appointment coordinator or primary dental assistant, you should consider experience last. Many practices have hired inexperienced

personnel for key positions and have been very successful. The employee's ability to learn, understand, and apply their knowledge is far more important than focusing only on their previous experience. The minimum experience required for a given position will depend on your individual practice and what your office can afford to lend a new employee. An experienced employee can save time and aggravation and make a smooth transition with minimal training. Remember, your patients are the first to feel some anxiety when someone on staff is new and has to yield to others to fulfill the

patient's dental care needs.

CONCLUSION

Before hiring an individual, employers need to know who they are and the types of characteristics they possess. You can succeed, and following these guidelines can open many doors—not only to hiring an ideal employee—but also toward retaining individuals who fit these important qualities.

Someone who fits these characteristics will have the shine and luster of a pearl, and you should value such an employee as a jewel. ○

REFERENCE

1. Waldrop MM: Dee Hock on Management. *The Magazine*. Fast Company.com. Available at: www.fastcompany.com/online/05/dee2.html#. Accessed March 18, 2002.

