

Staffing: Seven Steps to Build a Superior Team



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Intended Audience: Dentists, Dental Hygienists, Dental Assistants, Dental Students, Dental Hygiene Students, Dental Assisting Students, Office Managers

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Disclaimer: Participants must always be aware of the hazards of using limited knowledge in integrating new techniques or procedures into their practice. Only sound evidence-based dentistry should be used in patient therapy.

Conflict of Interest Disclosure Statement

- Dr. Levin does consulting work for the Procter & Gamble Company. He has no relevant financial relationships to disclose.

Short Description

Learn about Staffing: Seven Steps to Build a Superior Team dental CE course & enrich your knowledge in oral healthcare field.

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Overview

Staffing and teambuilding have always been a challenge in dentistry, as they are in most other businesses. Staffing and teambuilding are not as simple as just hiring the right people. There are seven steps required to build and maintain a superior practice team – recruiting, interviewing, hiring, compensation, training, retaining and avoiding burnout. By following the guidelines contained in this course, the practice can build a superior team with high longevity, creating an environment where everyone enjoys coming to work and derives high levels of satisfaction.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this course, the dental professional should be able to:

- Understand the changing mindset of dental team members today regarding employment and the factors that contribute to elevated levels of job satisfaction.
- Learn the seven steps of building a superior team that will allow any practice to help the team experience continual growth and go to the next level.
- Comprehend the strategies relative to recruiting, interviewing, and hiring team members that will help overcome the staff shortage and ensure that each new addition to the dental team is the right fit for the practice.

Introduction

Staffing and team building have always been a challenge in dentistry, as they are in most other businesses. It is more of an art than a science to hire, train, motivate and retain the right team members. Adding to the complexity is the need to create a cohesive team that works together with efficiency and harmony. Building a superior team should be the goal of every dental practice.



However, teams are dynamic, not static. They go through all types of phases as different team members have issues, challenges, and opportunities in both their personal and work lives, which as they emerge, cause individual team members to behave differently. That can lead to friction or tension amongst the team. This creates deteriorating performance which no practice wants and is the main reason that team building is an ongoing activity.

Staffing and teambuilding is not as simple as just hiring the right people. There are articles that would lead you to think that this is all it takes, but the team is changing constantly, and the building process needs to have a focus every day. Practices that can build cohesive, efficient, and harmonious teams not only tend to have higher levels of practice, production, and profitability, but they also have higher satisfaction, enjoyment, and overall fun.

The Changing Desires of Today's Dental Staff Member

There's been a dynamic shift in what people want from a job today. Traditionally, business is focused on transactional employment, which can be defined as "you pay someone to do a job and they do it." Today we are seeing a

shift to what I call “relationship employment.” People have a much deeper need to derive different types of satisfaction from their work. Consider the following:

1. Purpose. Many dental team members today work for a paycheck, but that is not their main goal. They want to have a purpose, and that purpose could be making a difference in the success of the practice, providing excellent patient care, interacting with other people, or being in a professional services environment. Having a purpose that is clearly defined is often referred to as a mission. Your mission will go a long way toward helping people feel high levels of satisfaction in their work.

2. Collegiality. Many people also want to be part of a positive harmonious team. They want to go to work to be with coworkers that they also view as friends who are supportive, positive and moving in the same direction. People no longer want to feel anxious on Sunday night as if “I have to go to work tomorrow.” Instead, they want to look forward to going to work. They want to be in an environment that has a positive strong culture where they feel that they work in cooperation with others to achieve daily and long-term goals.

3. Flexibility. Although this is difficult for dental practices, there are an increasing number of people today that would like to have more flexibility in their work. Between children, daycare, elderly parents, and other life challenges, they would like to be able to work only on certain days or certain hours. In fact, we are already seeing an increase in job sharing in dental practices where the dental assistant position is split between two team members to combat some of the effects of the dental staffing shortage.

4. Growth opportunities. Jobs in dental practices often have limited growth opportunities. Team members cannot necessarily be promoted or moved to other departments easily as how it happens within larger corporations. However, growth opportunities can also come in the form of additional advanced training, bonus systems,

increased responsibility, and periodic meetings to identify the team member’s interests. Leaders today have a new role beyond simply showing up every day. It is imperative that they spend time with team members to understand their individual needs and motivations, all of which leads to higher levels of staff longevity.

Learning Theory

There are seven steps required to build and maintain a superior team. They are:

Step 1: Recruiting

There are no guarantees when it comes to recruiting and there are no “slam dunk” strategies. The first step is to write a job description that clearly defines exactly what you want the job to be and be able to communicate it to a potential candidate.

The second strategy is online advertising. Remember that one key element of identifying good candidates is making your ad stand out. Make your ad energetic, enthusiastic, and upbeat. Talk about positive factors such as joining a talented team, having a true purpose in the position, gaining opportunities for growth and development, and earning a signing bonus.

The third strategy is to offer team members a referral bonus if they refer a candidate for a position that is hired and stays 90 days. Team members often know people that would make excellent additions to the staff and when a team member recommends another individual, it is someone they would like to work with.

The fourth strategy is to speak to recruiting firms. Recruiting firms often have broader reach and more candidates, but they also have the same challenge in a tight labor market of not having as many people to offer for potential positions. So, it’s important to engage in excellent interviewing, even though the recruiting firm has theoretically screened the candidate.

The fifth strategy is to identify part-time individuals if you cannot find a full-time person. There has been a recent uptick in the number of part-time dental staff members as some

people no longer want to work a full four- or five-day week.

The sixth strategy is to reconnect with previous team members who have left employment with the practice but might be interested in coming back. Frequently, a former team member returning to the practice can be a win-win.

The seventh strategy is to offer benefits beyond the basics. To attract excellent candidates some practices are now offering gas benefits, extra days off, retirement benefits, and even retention bonuses.

The eighth strategy is signing bonuses. Signing bonuses prior to the pandemic of 2020 were mostly used in recruiting sports figures and high-level executives. Now they are more common in dentistry as well and should be considered. You can get a sense of how to structure a signing bonus by reading online advertisements from other offices.

Step 2: Interviewing

Interviewing is a very time consuming and arduous process. Especially when the candidate does not show up! We suggest you begin with phone screening all candidates before setting up live meetings. This can be done either by a doctor or team member and the screening questions should determine whether this individual should receive a live interview appointment. Questions can include:

Sample Phone Screening Questions

- Are you currently employed?
- What is your current position and title?
- How long have you had this job?
- Do you have dental office experience?
- Have you worked on ...?
- Why are you seeking a change?
- Are you available full-time?
- Do you have any specific salary requirements?

It is also important to complete a job description. The job description should include:

Job Description Details

- Job title
- Job purpose
- Job duties and responsibilities
- Values and purpose (mission)
- Teamwork, and cooperation
- Required qualifications
- Preferred qualifications
- Educational requirements
- Experience level required
- Knowledge, skills, abilities, licensure
- Working conditions

If the candidate is offered a live interview after the phone screening, you should request that they email a résumé. The practice can then also check references prior to the live interview, allowing it to be prepared to offer the candidate a position during the meeting.

In the past it was often recommended to hold 2 to 3 interviews with a potential candidate. However, today it is more effective to plan on holding only 1 in-person interview. There's a danger that waiting too long may result in the candidate accepting another position. Once the phone screening is complete and the résumé has been requested the interviewer should be prepared to present a job offer if the live interview shows that they are the right candidate.

The overall approach is to be prepared for the interview through phone screening, résumé review, reference checks, and offer prep.

Step 3: Hiring

One of the best strategies when it comes to making a hiring decision is to simply have a conversation during the interview. Get the candidate talking and take the opportunity to learn about them. Questions to get them talking can include:

- What were your last three jobs?
- How would you describe your personality?
- Why do you like dentistry?

- What do you not like doing in the office?
- How well do you get along with others?
- How well do you function on the team?
- What do you dislike about your previous jobs?
- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- How have you grown in the last few years?

The purpose of the interview is to get to know the candidate both from a skillset level and as an individual. By having an open conversation and asking questions, you can gain a sense of how well this individual may fit on your team and contribute to the practice.

Step 4: Compensation

Compensation is one of the most important and complex aspects of bringing on new staff members. First, you must have a sense of what the compensation packages are in your local market for a specific position. You can ask colleagues, contacts, and recruiting firms. You can also read national surveys, dental business magazines, and dental advertisements. Remember, as recommended above, you should ask the candidate if they have any salary requirements. Knowing these factors will help you bring together a competitive compensation package. Additionally, a dental-knowledgeable CPA that works with numerous dentists can be an excellent resource for compensation package information as well.

Additionally, signing bonuses are becoming more popular. If you offer a signing bonus, be sure that it is paid over six months and that if the team member leaves, they lose access to any further signing bonus payments.

Step 5: Training

Great companies, and great dental practices know that today they must provide training to help team members grow and develop. The likelihood of hiring a fully skilled team member is lower today than in the past, especially given the technological revolution in dentistry and how that has increased the complexity of knowledge team members must have.

The single best, and only, way to train team members is to set clear objectives and provide documented, proven, step-by-step systems

designed to achieve them. This creates a much easier way for new team members to train quickly and for current team members to develop higher proficiency and move to higher levels of growth and development.

When training dental team members, it is critical that the materials and programming be constructed to comply with the best practices for adult learning. For example, role playing is a very effective technique to teach the doctors and team how to communicate with each and to persuade patients to behave in the desired manner. Whether it is scripting to accept open slots in the schedule, or to accept recommended treatment, practicing these interactions internally, with live interaction and feedback will produce far better results than simply providing a team member a script to read on their own.

It is also important that all training includes clear explanations of how the information being shared is relevant to the practice. Team members respond better to being told “why” in addition to “how”.

Step 6: Retaining the current team

Employee retention strategies are frequently overlooked by leaders in dental practices. Once a new employee joins the team you want them to stay. And keeping existing employees in their current jobs is also highly desirable. It is very expensive to replace a team member. According to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), a company can expect to spend 6 to 9 months of an employee’s salary to replace them.¹ The most successful retention strategy (beyond competitive compensation) is to treat team members as customers and provide them with excellent customer service. The more we treat our team as customers, the more likely we are to retain them, build motivation, and enthusiasm and increase staff longevity. One recommendation is to develop an annual calendar of customer events strictly focused on the team. In developing your calendar consider the following questions:

- What education will be provided?
- What meetings will be held and what are the agendas?
- What training is needed?

- What fun activities will the team engage in throughout the year?

You also want to build a phenomenally positive office culture. Workers today don't want "just a job." They want to belong to something important, feel like they're making a difference, go to work to enjoy their coworkers as friends, and have respect for the leadership in their practice. Positive cultures have a tremendous impact on building a positive and successful team.

Furthermore, don't forget to create a fun environment. People like fun and when they're having a good time, they feel that they are working in the right practice. Surprises such as lunches, stocking the refrigerator or staff room with food and snacks, and other activities to demonstrate appreciation, go a long way toward building staff longevity, loyalty, and enthusiasm.

Another effective strategy is to offer a retention bonus. This is a bonus, for example, that could be paid on the anniversary of a team member's hire date at 1, 3, 5, 10, 15, and 20 years with escalating amounts. Keep in mind that paying out even a significant bonus amount is much more cost effective than having to replace a team member.

Finally, we recommend that you meet with each team member periodically just to have a 10- or 15-minute conversation. Talk about how they are doing and what they see regarding the

practice. This is not a performance review. It is a casual "catch-up", and dentists should be very careful to listen to each team member.

Step 7: Avoiding Burnout

In today's world of dentistry, we are always in danger of burning out the current team. In fact, the World Health Organization refers to burnout as an "occupational phenomenon."² In other words, it is not just fatigue, but a real syndrome. Burnout isn't something that you can recover from in an afternoon, day off, or a vacation. If people burn out, they won't function nearly as well, and the practice will suffer. To avoid burnout, dentists and office managers need to function as compassionate leaders, understand the individual and collective needs of team members, update systems, prioritize tasks around the systems, and work to regularly simplify the office. This is what many of the best practices do, and it has had a tremendous impact on higher levels of motivation, efficiency, and performance.

Summary

Dentistry is facing a staffing shortage that is also occurring in many industries. The recommendations made in this course will help any practice perform better when it comes to recruiting, interviewing, hiring, compensation, training, retaining, avoiding burnout. By following these recommendations, the practice can build a superior team with high longevity, creating an environment where everyone enjoys coming to work and derives high levels of satisfaction.

Course Test Preview

To receive Continuing Education credit for this course, you must complete the online test. Please go to: www.dentalcare.com/en-us/ce-courses/ce700/test

- 1. Job seekers have shifted away from working only for a paycheck and today are also focused on which of the following objectives?**
 - A. Achieving a clearly defined sense of purpose in their work.
 - B. Earning loyalty points on their credit card for purchases made on behalf of their employer.
 - C. Receiving the maximum amount of paid time off as possible.

- 2. The World Health Organization refers to burnout in what manner?**
 - A. The result of working more than 40 hours per week
 - B. An occupational phenomenon
 - C. Treatable with anti-depressant pharmaceuticals

- 3. Which of the following questions should NOT be asked of a candidate during the phone screening or interview process?**
 - A. Do you plan to have any (or more) children?
 - B. Do you have dental office experience?
 - C. Are you currently employed?

- 4. An effective way to establish the compensation for a team position is...**
 - A. Read through social media posts
 - B. Consult with a dental-knowledgeable CPA
 - C. Conduct your own national salary survey

- 5. What number of in-person interviews are recommended when hiring for a new position in today's employment environment?**
 - A. 1
 - B. 2
 - C. 3

- 6. What is the suggested schedule for paying a retention bonus to team members?**
 - A. On their 25th anniversary of employment
 - B. Every year, on the anniversary of their hire date
 - C. 1, 3, 5, 10, 15, and 20 year anniversary dates

- 7. After compensation, what is the most successful employee retention strategy?**
 - A. Treat team members as "customers" and provide them with excellent customer service.
 - B. Give everyone a \$5 gift card for a coffee shop on the first day of each month.
 - C. Hold 2-hour meetings each month with every team member to discuss their performance.

- 8. At what point after a new employee starts should the referral bonus be paid to the existing team member who referred the new employee to the practice?**
 - A. After 1 week
 - B. After 90 days
 - C. After 1 year

9. Signing bonuses are effective in attracting new employees to the dental practice.

- A. True
- B. False

10. Which of the following items should NOT be included in a written job description?

- A. Job title
- B. Required qualifications
- C. Age preferences

References

1. <https://hrshrm.shrm.org/blog/2017/10/essential-elements-employee-retention>
2. <https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-diseases>. Accessed April 10, 2023.

Additional Resources

- No Additional Resources Available.

About the Author

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Dr. Roger P. Levin is the CEO of Levin Group, a leading dental management consulting firm. Founded in 1985, Levin Group has worked with over 30,000 dental practices. Dr. Levin is one of the most sought-after educators in dentistry and is a leading authority on dental practice success and sustainable growth.

Through extensive research and cutting-edge innovation, Dr. Levin is a recognized expert on propelling practices into the top 10%. He has authored 65 books and over 4,000 articles on dental practice management and marketing.

Dr. Levin sits on the editorial board of 5 prominent dental publications and has been named as one of the “Leaders in Dentistry” by Dentistry Today magazine for the last 15 years. He was recently named one of the “32 Most Influential People in Dentistry” by Incisal Edge magazine and voted Best Dental Consultant by the readers of Drbicuspid.com. He has been featured in the Wall Street Journal, New York Times, and Time magazine and is the creator of the Levin Group Tip of the Day which has over 30,000 subscribers.

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