



REPRODUCE

Staff turnover!

For more on this topic, go to www.dentaleconomics.com and search using the following key words: *staff turnover, practice management, burnout, stress, dental team, hiring guidelines, staff longevity, wages, benefits.*

Dear Dianne,

I bought a practice from a retiring dentist six years ago. All five of the staff members stayed on with the practice, but now only one of the original five is still with me. Additionally, my attempts at finding good staff members have fallen short, and I have had far too much turnover. It is obvious to me that I need help! I think part of the problem is that I'm not hiring the right people. Could you give me some guidelines to follow when selecting new staff members?

Turnover Teresa

Dear Turnover,

In my experience, the number one cause of stress in the dental office is staffing issues. Many doctors have told me the daily stress of practice management and staffing problems often takes the joy out of their work life, even to the point of burnout and leaving the profession.

So why is it some doctors have happy, contented staff members with little turnover, while others have continual turnover and chaos?

The answer could be: 1) The work environment is not conducive to staff longevity, or 2) the wrong people are being hired. Before we look at specific hiring guidelines, let's look at some factors influencing staff longevity.

1. Appreciation and respect — People do not stay where they feel they are not appreciated or respected. Many doctors mistakenly think that the paycheck is the only form of appreciation necessary. Doctors should verbally express their genuine appreciation. Do not expect perfection from imperfect people, including yourself.

2. Pleasant working relationships — The best offices have that “family feeling,” and the atmosphere is light and harmonious. Hire friendly, congenial people — personality is a plus! You can teach skills, but you *cannot* teach personality.

3. Good pay and benefits — If you have an above-average practice, do above-average dentistry, and wish to hire and retain above-average people, you must pay above-average wages. Resources such as the *DE*® salary survey provide staff salary information gathered from doctors across the country.

4. The integrity factor — If you want staff members to respect you, there can be no breaches of your integrity professionally or personally. Staff members form perceptions of a doctor's character by how he or she deals with them and with patients.

5. Comfortable scheduling and back-up systems — Stress is another factor that can be the deciding factor in whether a good employee stays with a practice or leaves. In too many practices, the schedule controls the practice rather than the practice controlling the schedule. When there is good communication between the clinical and business areas of the practice, the daily schedule can be controlled to reduce stress.

Here are some guidelines on hiring the right people.

❶ Make sure you place an employment ad that will attract the kind of person you wish to hire. An example:

***Dental Chairside Assistant** — Our family dental practice needs one enthusiastic, experienced, caring dental assistant to complete our dental team. If you are dependable, personally stable, and X-ray certified, call 123-4567, between 10 a.m. and 12 p.m.*

❷ Have the prospective employee bring a resume and/or fill out a job application that you provide.

❸ The two most important traits in any new hire are: work ethic and attitude. Require and check references.

❹ Keep a file of patients who inquire about job possibilities for future reference. Other good sources are the local high school, bank tellers, waitresses, temporary agencies, community colleges, or referrals from staff members.

❺ A good rule of thumb at the interview is to let the candidate talk 80% of the time and you talk 20% of the time.

❻ **Ask open-ended questions, such as:** *What did you like best about your former position?*

The keys to having a great team are:

- ✓ Hire good people.
- ✓ Pay them well.
- ✓ Commend in public, criticize in private.
- ✓ Create opportunities for continual learning and growth.
- ✓ Fire with impunity those who do not thrive. **DE**

Dianne Glasscoe-Watterson assists dental practices in achieving their highest potential through practical, effective onsite consulting. Her continuing-education courses help dental professionals refresh their knowledge base and reignite professional passion. Visit Dianne's Web site at www.professionaldentalmgmt.com or e-mail her at dglasscoe@northstate.net.