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## Staff Matters: How Can We Be More Creative with Our Benefits?

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# How Can We Be More Creative with Our Benefits?



By Jodi Schafer, SPHR, SHRM-SCP  
HRM Services

**Question:** We are holding our open enrollment for health benefits this month. This got us thinking about our overall benefit offerings. What are some creative benefits we might offer that are relatively inexpensive and attractive to our employees?

**Answer:** According to a recent *Forbes* article where they surveyed employers and employees (“Best Employee Benefits in 2023,” February 2023), 62% of businesses have changed their benefit offerings in the past year. So, you are not alone in thinking about this topic. With this tight labor market, it is important to assess compensation and benefits, as you work to recruit and retain employees.

As you can imagine, health benefits, especially medical coverage, are often the No. 1 benefit employees are seeking, especially if they are over the age of 26. Kudos to your practice for providing health coverage to your employees; we know that it can be very expensive. If you are not already offering spousal/partner or family coverage as part of your medical coverage, that might be the place to start.

In addition to health insurance, life insurance and retirement plans are the most popular benefits for both employers and employees. Beyond these top three, the list starts to get creative. Below are some additional options to consider:

**Pet insurance:** This has become a popular benefit, especially for younger workers. Veterinary care is expensive, and having insurance can support employees to care for their pets without creating financial strain. With the increase in emotional support animals, this benefit can also aid the mental well-being of employees.

**Paid volunteer time:** One way employers can support their community as well as their employees is to offer a specific amount of paid time monthly or annually for volunteering. This also supports working parents who want to participate in their child’s school activities. Coordinating schedules can always be challenging, but you can set up parameters for advanced notice and coverage that would make this benefit easier to offer.

**Lunch and learns:** Many employees are interested in their continued growth and development, even beyond job-related skills. One idea is to partner with community businesses to offer non-mandatory lunch and learn sessions on specific topics of interest to employees. Often, the partner business may be willing to purchase the lunch in addition to providing information and an overview of their services. A good example of this is financial planning firms. Many will provide the lunch as well as information on long-term planning, budgeting, etc. They are usually willing to provide this service for free, as they assume that they may get some employees to sign up for their services. You could request to sit through a demo of their presentation to ensure that it has value and is not just a sales pitch. MDA Insurance frequently conducts these types of lunch and learns in dental offices, and the response has been favorable.

**Flexible scheduling:** Ensuring adequate staff coverage can often be one of the biggest challenges in a dental practice. However, when done well, and in coordination with your staff, it can provide both coverage as well as flexibility for your employees. For example, if you have an assistant who would like to drop off and pick up their kids at school in the morning and the afternoon, perhaps they work a five- or six-hour daily schedule. Another employee may wish to work only mornings because they need to take care of an aging parent or grandchild in the afternoon. Having flexible work times, including part-time schedules, is a priority benefit to many working parents or those who are taking care of aging family members. While it may cause some headaches when first setting it up, in the long term it may help your practice stand apart from your competitors for attracting and retaining employees.

These are just a few ideas as you think about how to strategically support your practice to be an attractive place to work. Lastly, do not be afraid to ask employees what they wish was offered. You might be surprised to find that some of their ideas are inexpensive and easy to implement. ●

*Jodi Schafer’s Most-Asked Human Resources Questions are now available at [store.michigandental.org](http://store.michigandental.org) for free download.*