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## Staff Matters: Attracting Qualified Candidates

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# Attracting Qualified Candidates

By Jodi Schafer, SPHR, SHRM-SCP

**Question:** Like many employers in this job market, we are struggling to recruit new staff. We have many positions unfilled, including hygienists, assistants, and office staff. What are some new strategies we might try to stand out from our competitors and attract qualified candidates to our practice?

**Answer:** You are right. It is a tight labor market right now. The “great resignation” that started in 2021 and continues into 2022 is leaving many jobs unfilled and employers struggling. In addition, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that dental hygienists and dental assistant openings are projected to grow by 11% between 2020 and 2023. These trends mean that the labor shortage in the dental industry is unlikely to change any time soon.

So, how can your practice stand out from others and attract qualified candidates? This job market is forcing employers to adapt their way of doing business. Here are some ideas:

**Offer more part-time positions.** Providing more part-time options may be attractive for several reasons, including offering flexibility with child care arrangements and supporting greater work-life balance. Women make up the vast majority of dental hygienists, dental assistants, and office staff. Women are still primarily responsible for handling home and child care arrangements for their families, and after becoming a parent, some women may wish to switch to a job with greater flexibility. Offering part-time positions may appeal to trained staff who have left the workforce previously, enticing them to rejoin. Also, don't forget about your current employees. Offering a part-time option may help retain existing staff who are experiencing burnout.

Of course, there are additional considerations when offering part-time options, including decisions on what benefits to offer and scheduling considerations, but these costs and logistical details may pay off in recruiting and retaining talent. Start by talking with your existing employees about their interest in part-time options. You can

also test out the option with a couple of staff to assess how it works and then decide to expand from there.

**Consider offering evening appointments.** You may be thinking, what does evening scheduling have to do with recruiting and retaining staff? Along with part-time options, there is a segment of workers who may appreciate working non-traditional hours, including those who have someone at home able to provide child care in the evening. You may have patients who appreciate this option too!

**Provide additional benefits.** Support with child care costs and continuing education may give you the edge as compared with other practices. If you don't already offer retirement match and/or student loan payment assistance, these can set you apart too.

**Pay attention to your image.** With a tight labor market, employees can be choosier on where they want to work. Employees want to work at practices that treat their staff and patients well. If your patient reviews are not positive overall (more than just a periodic bad review), it could mean that there are other issues happening in the practice that need attention. Discontent in a practice not only impacts patient satisfaction, but employee recruitment and retention as well. And if there are other employment options that look more attractive as a place to work, high quality employees will choose to apply somewhere else.

In addition to paying attention to online reviews, spend some time marketing your practice online via social media and your website. Potential employees are researching your practice and you want them to see a place that looks like a great place to work.

**Build your future workforce.** Do you have office staff who are interested in becoming dental assistants or hygienists? Do you partner with your local high school career institute or community college by providing internships or other shadowing opportunities for students? Building up your talent pipeline is a long-term strategy to cultivate your future workforce.

While these strategies may not be an immediate fix, together they can help build and retain a high-quality workforce for the long term. ●