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Utilizing 'Unretired' Workers to Address Hiring Challenges



By Jodi Schafer, SPHR, SHRM-SCP
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Question: We are really struggling to retain our front office staff. Not only is it challenging to find qualified people, but those that we have hired end up not working out for a variety of reasons. These roles are so important to help our busy practice run smoothly. Are there other strategies we should try in order to find and retain strong front office staff?

Answer: You are not alone. The fight for talent continues to be an issue for many practices, and according to labor statistics will continue to be a challenge into the future. To address this problem, there are multiple recruitment and retention strategies that we often recommend, such as offering part-time schedules and flexibility when possible, re-examining your compensation and benefits package to make sure it is competitive, and using a variety of networks for sharing your postings.

One additional strategy you might consider is targeting “unretired” workers. These are people who have reached retirement age, or may have recently retired, but are still interested in working. According to research by Bain & Company, 41% of Americans expect to work past the age of 65, as compared to just 12% 30 years ago. By the year 2030, 150 million jobs globally will have shifted to workers over the age of 55.

Many in this group are choosing to continue working so that they can maintain social connections, be involved in meaningful activities, and also bring in additional income. And the good news is that this demographic brings many years of experience to the table. They understand the value of customer service and how important it is to fulfill work commitments in a reliable, dependable way. You may even find someone who has prior work history in the dental setting, so they could put their expertise to work in your practice and perhaps even serve as a mentor for others on your team.

The “unretired” population has several motivations that you should consider when structuring the role. They

are typically looking for flexibility in scheduling, and likely looking for part-time hours. Even more appealing will be the flexibility to choose the days that they work, so they can balance work with other family, wellness, and social-related activities. Those who have retired from work in dental or medical practices may miss being connected to the profession and may be motivated by the opportunity to contribute their expertise. Others are motivated by additional training and learning new skills, or perhaps by entering a different field. Access to retirement planning resources and wellness perks are also appealing. Finally, and potentially most pertinent to you, this group is motivated by targeted benefits such as dental care, which could supplement the health care coverage that they already have. Many times these benefits are more important to them than the hourly wage.

So, how do you reach this group? Talk with your staff and personal networks to gauge if anyone has connections with recently retired colleagues, friends, or family members. Create a compelling job posting that targets this group and is clear about the structure of the position (for example, part-time, flexible, etc.). Post the position in places where this age group may frequent, such as AARP job posting sites, Facebook, etc. Make sure your website and marketing materials represent a multi-generational workforce, and that your interview teams are also age-representative (when possible).

While those in the “unretired” workforce may not solve all your front office staffing needs, they can be an untapped resource for supplementing and supporting your full-time team members. With the right structure and strategic approaches to recruitment, you may find that this approach may also work for recruiting for your other dental hygienist and assistant positions. Good luck! ●

Jodi Schafer's Staff Matters® and Most-Asked Human Resources Questions are both available for free download on the MDA website. Visit store.michigandental.org.