

The Importance of Employee Retention

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Dental practices today are facing unprecedented challenges in recruiting dental staff, especially dental assistants, dental hygienists, dentists and dental front desk staff.

During the pandemic, many dental staff left the workforce, and a great many never returned, leading to widespread shortages of qualified staff. These shortages have resulted in “bidding wars,” which have driven up dental staff salaries. To compete in this competitive recruitment environment, dental practices have had to increase wages, which has created an additional financial stressor on practices that were already struggling to get back on firm footing after the pandemic.

Dental practices that are forward-thinking have shifted their focus from replacing lost dental staff to retaining existing dental staff. This is a sound strategic shift, as it enables a dental practice to maintain or build its momentum rather than being subjected to the rollercoaster ride of constant ebbs and flows in dental staffing and resulting productivity dips. It is much more cost effective to retain existing dental staff than to recruit and train new staff.

This shift in focus requires dental practices to take a hard look at why good staff leave. This can be a painful process of evaluation and reflection but is a necessary first step to create a workplace where people want to be rather than the one everyone wants to leave.

The following is a list of the primary

reasons why people leave their jobs:

1. Better Pay.

This is especially true right now while inflation is at an all-time high. If you want to keep staff, you must know what the prevailing wages are in your community and be prepared to meet those increased wages. Hardwire the additional cost into your dental budget and remember that these staff are essential to helping you achieve your access and financial goals. In many cases, these staff pay for themselves many times over by the increased productivity they facilitate. Also don't forget to talk about the monetary value of the benefits you are offering employees.

2. Poor Leadership.

Bad managers are a primary reason why good people quit. Leadership isn't intrinsic but is something that can be learned. There are many great resources available to help people develop their leadership skills. Remember to always lead by example.

3. Better Opportunities.

You may or may not be able to do much about this, but do consider whether you can offer career advancement opportunities wherever possible, especially for entry level staff like assistants and reception staff.

4. Overworked.

A common mistake we see is failure to ramp down on patient care when staffing levels are down—this results in the remaining staff being overworked, which contributes to burnout and increased turnover. Always make sure your dental practice is working within its potential capacity, which is calculated based on program resources.

5. Underappreciated.

It costs nothing to tell people that they are valued and appreciated. Make sure your staff hear this from you on a regular basis.

6. Team Issues.

Sometimes good people quit because they are fed up with seeing bad employees continuing to get away with being bad. You can't ignore poor performers as it demoralizes good staff and poisons the entire team.

7. Better Work-Life Balance.

Today, employees are seeking a better balance between their work and personal lives. If your employees are seeking more flexible schedules, try and accommodate them if possible so they don't leave to find a better work-life balance elsewhere.

8. Better Company Culture.

This is another side effect of the pandemic—employees are paying more attention to the culture within their companies. They are no longer willing to tolerate toxic or unsafe workplaces.

9. Sense of Mission.

Employees want to work for companies with a clear vision of how their work is making the world a better place, so make sure your dental staff understand the important role they play in improving the lives of the people they serve.

As a dental leader, keep your finger on the pulse of how your staff is feeling. Periodic staff satisfaction surveys can be a helpful tool to solicit feedback, but look for opportunities to meet regularly with staff (individually and as a team) to find out how people are feeling and how you can help them get the most out of their work experience.



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