



Recruiting Employee Dentists for Practice Growth

By Simon Palmer

I always find it amazing how stringent and narrow the criteria most practices have when they are looking for an employee dentist. It is often as if many principal dentists are looking for a clone of themselves or someone that reminds them of themselves at a younger age (with a forgetful airbrush over how green and inexperienced they were at that age). It seems to me that in doing so, practices may be looking at the dentist recruitment process in the wrong light. Having an employee dentist isn't just an opportunity to find someone to ease the backlog of patients and cover for you when you are unavailable. It is also an opportunity to grow and potentially offer more services to a larger more varied patient base.

Practices will often come to us at DJS and say that while they don't discriminate in their recruitment process they know that their patients respond well to a dentist who is of a particular gender, ethnic background, age and experience. I am not saying that these practices are wrong in their assessment; they may have a point... **their** patients might respond better to a dentist of a particular demographic. However taking on a dentist from a different demographic may allow the practice to bring in patients from a different demographic.

Gender

A dentist taking on an associate or employee of the opposite gender will often find that:

- In doing so they add a more balanced energy to the practice.
- Many patients will seek out health care workers of a particular gender through familiarity. That is, they will seek out a male or female dentist because they have always had a dentist from that gender and that's what feels comfortable to them.
- Some female patients want a female healthcare worker because of their cultural/religious beliefs.

Skills

Look for skills that your practice has been outsourcing. If you have been referring out a lot of orthodontic work, for example, perhaps it would be in your interest to take on an employee dentist who can do that work. I recently spoke to a practice with two associates that retained \$200,000 in their practice by employing a dentist with endodontic skills.

Ethnic background

Look at the ethnic groups represented in the area. If there are some ethnic groups that make up a large proportion of the local population consider employing from within that ethnic group. In doing so you may be able to attract more patients from that segment of the local population much more effectively.

Age

A practice with middle aged or senior principal dentist associates sometimes find that taking on a couple of graduates brings a new life to the practice.

They will often bring:

- youthful energy and enthusiasm for work and dentistry,
- new procedures, and
- a younger market.

On the flip side, a couple of young dentist associates may find that taking on an employee in his or her 50s or 60s adds an appearance of experience and wisdom to the practice.

Experience

Many practices request experienced dentists only. I understand their very valid concerns about not compromising their clinical standards. However they may be overlooking the potential that exists in a graduate dentist. A dentist who has twenty years experience may be very set in his ways by that stage.

When you are looking for an employee dentist to adapt and fit in with a practice's philosophy and protocols, it may be easier to start someone from scratch and mentor them to integrate rather than taking on someone who finds it hard to change from protocols, philosophy and behaviour that are long established.

Nationality

Often I find that foreign born and qualified dentists are more interested in going to rural practices for employment than Australians. Usually this is because of access to lifestyle (e.g Access to surf beaches, uncrowded beaches, parks, facilities, etc) or culture (access to indigenous communities) that is completely unavailable in their home country and is taken for granted by Australians.

Hours

Another criterion to look for in an employee dentist that may enable your practice to grow, is hours in which they are available. Often, working patients will find it hard to come to dental appointments between 9-5 Monday- Friday. Look at your practice's opening hours. Could you possibly cater to more patients if you were able to offer Saturday appointments or evening appointments a couple of nights per week?

If the answer to either of those questions is yes, then looking for a dentist who is willing to work these hours may increase your patient base and allow you to be more cost effective with your utilization of the practice.

Often the best partnerships whether they are of a personal nature or professional are not born of people who are similar. They are born of people who are compatible because they complement each others skills and weaknesses. The recipe for success in a dental practice may be to find someone who brings something different to the table. Someone who is strong where you are weak so that your combined skill set and what you bring to the practice is far more complete than either one alone.

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