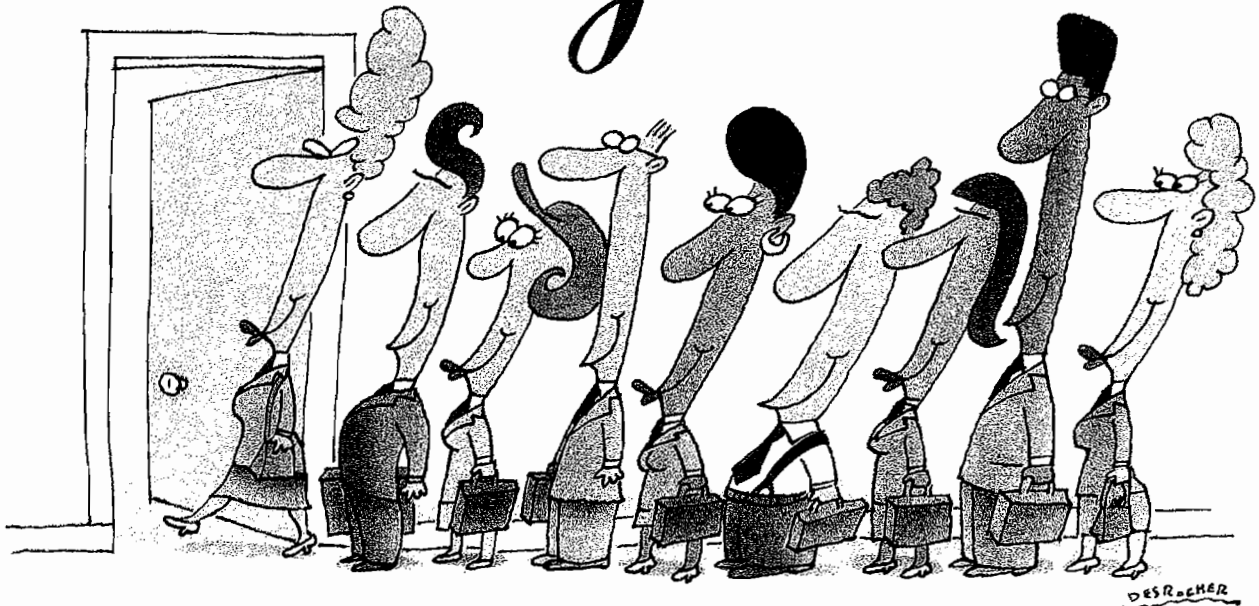


# Hiring QUALIFIED STAFF



**H**ere comes a time in your dental practice when help is needed. You can't do everything yourself. This could be your first employee or an addition to your current staff. All the tasks required to continue to have a caring, productive, patient-oriented dental practice are not being completed in a timely manner. You need help.

"Where do I look for the right person? How do I know if I am hiring the right person? How do I evaluate an applicant? How do I start new employees in a way that will keep the communication oper. between the employee and myself, insuring long-term employment?" As a consultant to dental practices throughout the US, I am asked

BY LYNN GARBBER

**The following are some guidelines to consider when advertising for a new employee:**

- Include the title of the position offered: Secretary/Receptionist, Dental Assistant, Dental Hygienist.
- Use words that attract attention in describing the job: meaningful, responsible, quality, exciting, challenging. Avoid using the term "immediate opening"—it could be negative to an applicant who is currently working and considering a change that would require notice to present employer. Also avoid using the term "highly motivated person." Instead, describe the job in such a way that it will appeal to this type of person. Such words as "exciting" and "challenging" appeal to highly motivated people.
- State only absolute requirements, i.e., typing, insurance processing, dental assistant, hygienist, etc.
- Mention benefits where they are attractive: medical insurance, four-day workweek, bonus system/incentives, a specific high salary—follow the amount with "if qualified."
- Mention the qualities that portray an attractive office image: modern, progressive, growing, team-oriented, caring.

these questions daily. I believe that, in order to find an excellent employee, you need to be clear on your requirements and have a specific hiring procedure.

This article will explore methods and guidelines to provide you with the skills needed to make great staff selections.

**Before you begin**



ou know you need help. Before you begin your search, it is important to have a written, detailed job description. A written

job description enables you to analyze the skill and experience level you need from your new employee.

The description you write needs to include the job title, a general description of the position, and a detailed outline of all specific duties and responsibilities.

A written job description not only helps you decide on the right candidate, but it also spells out to the applicant exactly what the job entails. The act of writing forces you to think in specifics and have a clear understanding of the employee you want.

**Finding a qualified employee**



here do I find the person who is right for my practice? Several sources are available to the new

practitioner:

- **Local Dental Organizations:** The American Dental Association and the American Dental Hygienists' Association local components have employment departments.
- **Dental Sales Representatives:** Often, when staff members want to make a change, they will ask their sales representative to inform them of the possibility of any open position.
- **Technical Schools:** Most technical schools have an employment service for their graduates.
- **Employment Agencies:** The prescreening time spent by a reputable employment agency can prove to be a wise investment. If you choose to use an employment agency, check with colleagues to determine the ones with which they have been successful.
- **Newspapers:** A winning advertisement will get you the right employee. When placing your ad, remember that the way you present your practice will influence the types of applicants you attract. Use your ad to attract qualified applicants with long-term goals. Be sure to include in your ad the position title, education requirements (if any), experience necessary, and any special benefits.

**Preparing for the interview**



ven though an applicant comes to the interview with a résumé, the résumé does not indicate details such as spelling, grammar, and penmanship. Therefore, you

need to have an application for the candidate to fill out. A good application will enable you to evaluate the quantity and quality of the applicant's experience. It keeps you the constant and the candidate the

variable.

The application should include areas for continuing dental education, applicants' self-assessed strengths and weaknesses, references, honors, and professional organization applications. Remember, it cannot include inquiries about marital status, children, national origin, religion, or age.

Proper selection and placement of an applicant depends, to a great extent, on your interviewing skills. Your interview should be scheduled at a time when there will be no interruptions, so you can devote your full attention to the applicant.

It is important to begin the interview by putting the applicant at ease, since most applicants experience some nervousness when entering an office. Starting the interview on time with a warm, cordial greeting from you and your receptionist helps the applicant to relax and feel comfortable.

A good interviewer learns more from listening than talking. Remember to do the following:

- Review the applicant's résumé and application before the interview.
- Ask thought-provoking questions—ones that require more than a "yes" or "no" answer.
- Listen to the manner in which the applicant answers your questions as well as the actual answer. Take into consideration that an applicant is likely to be a bit nervous.
- Ask the applicant if there are any questions.
- Provide information about the position you are offering: hours, salary, benefits, etc.
- Give the applicant a date by which, if chosen, the applicant will be notified.

Upon completion of your interview with an applicant, record the facts of the interview and rate the candidate by reviewing the list of criteria you have developed for the position you are offering. Doing this immediately helps your decision to be more objective.

## Secretary/Receptionist

*General description: Coordinate business and financial aspects of the practice, schedule appointments, and serve as office receptionist.*

### SPECIFIC DUTIES

#### Business and Financial Duties

- Making financial arrangements with patients.
- Posting all charges and payments received daily.
- Collecting delinquent accounts.
- Balancing cash on hand daily.
- Preparing and mailing insurance reports.

#### Scheduling Duties

- Scheduling all appointments.
- Keeping patient records up to date.
- Registering patients.
- Confirming appointments scheduled the following day.
- Making follow-up calls regarding broken appointments, surgery and/or extensive procedures.

#### Receptionist Duties

- Greet patients.
- Answer telephone and take telephone messages.
- Keep reception room, business office, consultation room, and restroom neat and properly stocked.
- Show patient-education films.
- Turn on and control sound of stereo systems.

### Checking references



Each applicant is expected to furnish business and/or personal references. Although business references are of more value, personal references are an important substitute when it is not possible to obtain sufficient information about an individual's work record.

Check an applicant's references by telephone as people hesitate to

put any negative comments in writing. Asking the right questions will motivate an honest response:

- Was the applicant punctual and conscientious in carrying out work assignments?
- What was the applicant's date of employment?
- What was the applicant's salary at termination?
- Why did the applicant leave employment?
- What was the applicant's work-

**Here are some questions that you may want to ask when interviewing a prospective employee:**

- Tell me about yourself
- What did you do at your last job?
- What aspects of your last job did you like best?
- What aspects did you like least?
- Why did you leave your last job?
- If you could have made one suggestion to your last employer, what would it have been?
- What have you done that you're proud of?
- Describe the best boss you've ever had. The worst one.
- What do you consider your greatest strength?
- What kinds of things bother you the most?
- What else should I know about your qualifications? Is there anything you want to tell me about yourself?
- What else would you like to know about this job?

**If you like the applicant at this point, ask these questions:**

- When would you be available for employment?
- May I contact your present employer? (if still employed)
- Can vacations be arranged around the office schedule?

**You cannot ask about the following:**

- Age
- Religion
- US Citizenship
- Race
- High school graduation date
- Marital status
- Number of dependents
- Means of transportation to the office

related health history?

- Would you rehire the applicant?
- What were the candidate's responsibilities in order of importance?

- How would you rate the candidate's quality and volume of work?
- How would you describe the candidate's attitude?
- How would you characterize the

relationship between the candidate and his or her staff?

- What other information do you have that would help to develop a more complete picture of the candidate and his or her abilities?

**Getting started with a new employee**

Starting a new position often is puzzling and frightening. Before your new employee begins, sit down and let this new staff member know you are glad that he or she is a part of your team. Review the following with your new employee:

- The job title and working hours
- The job description—give the new employee a copy of the written job description for the position.
- The training program you have set up
- Give the new employee a tour of your office and introduce him or her to the other staff members.
- The employee benefits: vacation pay and schedule, holiday pay, insurance, continuing education, etc. (These should be in writing; an Employee Policy Manual is recommended.)

The procedure you follow when starting a new employee often can determine success or failure. If the new employee feels accepted immediately as a part of the team and has everyone's support, he or she is more likely to grow and succeed in the job.

Staff selection is a crucial element to long-term practice success. Hiring staff members carefully, and training and treating them well will develop a team that is loyal and dedicated. Always remember to treat your staff members like the dedicated professionals they are. ♦

*The author, Lynn Garber, is a well-known consultant and lecturer in the field of dental practice management with more than 30 years of experience in the dental profession. Ms. Garber's history includes working as a dental assistant and as a dental business coordinator and consultant with a national dental consulting company before founding Lynn Garber Consultants in 1982.*