

12 STEPS TO HIRING ROCK STAR EMPLOYEES IN YOUR DENTAL OFFICE

Hiring great employees is the most significant positive change that you can make in a dental practice. Here's how to do it right.

STEP 1: Get crystal-clear on what type of candidates you want to attract.

The ad soliciting resumes for an open position is a prime opportunity to attract great candidates. Unfortunately, it's one that most dental offices waste. Either they rule out dozens of great candidates by listing too many specific requirements, or they fail to attract the attention of great candidates by writing a lackluster ad.

Here's the RIGHT way to write an ad.

Make a list of all the qualities of your perfect candidate. Include everything you can think of, from personal traits to front office skills (including customer service) to dental training and essential work experience.

When you have a complete list, start ranking those qualities from most to least important. It might help to think of some qualities as "MUST HAVE" and others as "good to have."

Now, write the ad, keep in mind that it should also contain some information about why candidates should want to join this team.

STEP 2: Sell them on the position.

In other words, don't bore potential hires with the same old ad! A boring ad will attract a flood of boring resumes.

On the other hand, sell the opportunity and guarantee that the ad will attract more of the right type of applicants. Highly qualified candidates are looking for more than just a job—they want a position that will be rewarding and offer learning challenges.

So, consider this: what features of your office work environment will appeal to great candidates? Is it the family atmosphere? The availability of monthly continuing education for every team member? The ability to earn merit pay by hitting quarterly milestones? The ad needs to mention these bonuses, rather than simply focusing on candidate requirements. In other words, acknowledge outright that the hiring process involves an evaluation of fit on both sides, and give candidates a reason to care about working for THIS office.

STEP 3: Prioritize candidates who follow directions.

The job ad should specify exactly how to submit a resume. It's a good idea to include instructions that applicants must include in the cover letter. The first test of a great candidate is whether that person follows your instructions to the letter.

There are times when you'll receive a fantastic resume from someone who failed to follow your instructions. Be flexible in this case but treat it as a red flag. Be on the lookout for other reasons why that person may not be a good fit.

It goes without saying that great team members can take direction well. Be careful not to hire a closet diva who always wants to go his or her own way. The good news is, divas usually offer clues in the hiring process! It's all there, if you're looking for it.

STEP 4: Review resumes without mercy.

Applicants who are serious about being hired will triple-check their work before submitting it. They'll use spell check, proofread on their own, and ask someone else to check for typos as well.

On the other hand, someone who submits a resume with errors has clearly demonstrated to you that he or she has a sloppy work ethic. That's not going to change after hiring. Sometimes it gets worse! Resumes with errors go straight into the trash, no mercy.

STEP 5: Remember this mantra —“location, location, location.”

When you have a pool of good candidates and are looking to narrow down the options, take a hard look at the home address of a prospective employee. Assessing the commute now will save you heartache in the future.

When employees live too far from the office, it causes them pain—which means it ends up becoming a pain for you. Make no mistake, that employee will jump ship as soon as there's a comparable position closer to home. Or, if no better option presents itself, the employee will be the first to ask you for a salary increase to justify the commute.

Don't interview anyone who lives significantly farther from your office than your existing employees.

STEP 6: The red flags are waving, so pay attention!

Now that you've narrowed down candidates, it's time to take a fine-toothed comb to the remaining resumes.

There are three red flags to look for when selecting great candidates.

First, are there major gaps in work history that haven't been explained in the cover letter? Although this may not be an automatic reason to trash the resume, it's a factor that will count against a candidate if there are any other reasons you are hesitant to interview that person.

Second, do they avoid listing dates of employment altogether? Either this person hasn't worked anywhere for very long, or there's something that she or he is trying to hide.

Finally, pay attention to how long candidates stayed at previous jobs. A candidate who has a history of leaving jobs within a year isn't going to treat your office any differently.

STEP 7: Rule them out with the trusty voicemail test.

After selecting a few candidates that seem worthwhile, you might be thinking you're ready for some phone interviews.

Hold on, not so fast! Make sure that this step is getting the attention it deserves. The phone interview is by far the MOST important step in the entire hiring process. Instead of being in a hurry to schedule the face-to-face interview, take your time talking with every potential interview candidate on the phone.

Many candidates will save you work by ruling themselves out without even answering the phone. I'm talking about their voicemail message.

These people know they are trying to get a job, and they know potential employers might be calling them any day now—yet you get a voicemail message that is unprofessional or inappropriate. Let this be an indication to you exactly how this person is likely to represent you and your office as a team member.

When I get a message that says something like, "Yo, I can't take your call. I must be at the bar or doing something dumb, so leave a message and I might call you back," I end that call with a very quick click.

STEP 8: Use the actual phone interactions to substantially narrow your search.

Now, let's say that the candidate does answer the phone. I'm always surprised at how unprofessional people can be when they are looking for a job. You may find when you call someone that he answers the phone in a whisper because he's at work and will need to call you back. Or, she answers the phone while holding a crying baby and tries to carry on a conversation with you. The list goes on and on.

Inevitably, you must ask yourself if that was a good judgment call. This person could have easily let the call go to voicemail and then called you back after work or when the baby was sleeping. You need team members who can make good judgment calls day after day. Candidates who can't do it on the fly in a phone interview are not going to make great decisions in a dental office.

Let's say a candidate isn't automatically knocked out of the lineup because of ridiculous voicemail or a bad judgment call about when to answer the phone.

Next LISTEN.

Ask a question. Then, stop talking and really listen to the candidate. Listen closely! (You should also take notes, so that you can compare your impressions of candidates later on.)

What to listen for when you have a potential candidate on the phone:

- How do they sound? Polite, open, and cheerful? Or is it distracted, noncommittal, mumbly?
- Are they using a lot of slang, or do they sound professional?
- How do they answer the question you asked? Do you agree with what they're saying?
- Do they respond to questions with one or two words only? Or, do they continue responding to one question for the next 20 minutes because they don't know when to stop? (Remember, you're also testing candidates on their understanding of when THEY should stop and listen.)

Consider how it would feel for patients to interact with these candidates on the phone or across a desk. Would patients like to talk to them, or would they not?

STEP 9: Just before the scheduled interview time, check in with your front desk staff.

Now that you've narrowed it down to some great candidates, the moment of truth is here: your potential new team member is walking into the office.

Even before you get a look at the candidate, you can learn a lot by checking in with your reception staff for their immediate impressions. First, ask about punctuality—did the candidate arrive a few minutes early? Or, is the candidate a no-show as of two minutes before the scheduled interview time, leaving you to expect a flustered and self-conscious job candidate coming through the door any moment to make an excuse about traffic?

There's an old saying about how the best indicator of future behavior is past behavior, and yet I hear doctors complain all the time about employees who never show up to work on time. I bet you if we turn back the hands of time, that same employee did not show up to his or her interview on time.

Pull your front desk staff aside for a moment so that you can get any relevant feedback about the candidate's waiting room behaviors. If the candidate was rude to your staff or patients in the waiting area, or left a mess at the complimentary coffee station, you need to know about it as part of the total picture.

STEP 10: Get face to face with the candidate and trust your gut—what does YOUR first impression say?

Now that your staff has had a chance to weigh in, it's time to get your own first impression as you meet with the candidate for a formal interview.

What does your initial impression tell you? Take a good look at your potential new hire. Is he or she put together well? Are you dealing with someone who obviously just rolled out of bed? Is this someone who seems to take good care of clothes and other belongings? Would he or she match the culture of YOUR office?

Pay attention to the little details of how he or she interacts with you in the first few moments of being in the room together. Does the candidate make appropriate eye contact and offer a warm smile? What immediate thoughts do you have about his or her personality?

First impressions may not always be 100% accurate, but they do provide useful information to round out the total picture of the candidate later when you are weighing your hiring options.

STEP 11: The verbal interview—how well does the candidate respond to your questions?

As an interviewer, it's easy to get caught up doing all the talking. Your job right now is to listen. If you are paying attention, you'll learn everything you need to know about this candidate.

Here are some favorite questions to ask job candidates:

Tell me about your last position and why you are no longer there. I want to see how they handle the part about why they are no longer there. Do they throw their last employer under the bus? Do they tell me this long gossipy story about issues in their last position?

Tell me your best trait and your worst trait, and why. I phrase this so that they think they are telling me all positive stuff, but it is a good way to hear what they think is their worst trait. If they say something like, “I have to micromanage everything I do” or “I have to finish one project fully before I can start another,” think about how those character traits would play out in a busy dental office.

Tell me about your best and worst boss and what traits they had. I want candidates to tell me about what kind of bosses they like to work for and ones that they don’t like. If the “worst boss” that they describe sounds like you or your dentist, then this person may not be a good match.

If I were to ask a co-worker of yours about you, what would they say? Again, this one is spun to sound positive, but many times candidates shoot themselves in the foot. Something that seems like a positive response to the candidate may not be good for a dental office. As an example, a candidate might respond, “They would say that people love me. I am so good with people, I can sometimes sit and have hour-long conversations with customers. I just can’t stop someone from telling me a good juicy story.” This person is going to be a talker or gossiper—either way, someone who never gets work done.

STEP 12: Now, with a clear head, honestly evaluate the fit.

The last step in hiring a rock star employee is to discern whether this person is a great fit for your office. It’s easier said than done, though.

After taking the time for multiple phone and face-to-face interviews, you’re probably eager to end the hiring process and seal the deal by making an offer. But don’t jump the gun! It’s not enough to like the candidate personally. Think honestly about whether this person is who you need on your team. Does she or he have the skills and personality to serve your team and your patients effectively?

If you hesitate, that’s a sign that you need to move on and keep looking. Forcing a round peg into a square hole will only hurt everyone involved—your team, your patients and even the job candidate!

When a candidate is a great fit, it will be obvious.

Here’s how you’ll know:

- When you think about this person joining your team, you feel excitement and relief—no ambiguity.
- You look forward to the candidate’s first day at the office and you have 100% confidence that this person will be up to speed within a short time.
- Your response to “Should we hire this person?” isn’t probably or maybe, it’s DEFINITELY YES.

That’s when you know that you’ve found the rock star employee you’re looking for. Congratulations!