

The Hiring Process 101

One of the most challenging dilemmas an orthodontist faces today is how to hire a quality team. Although life might be a lot easier if you could do it all by yourself, surrounding yourself with a dedicated and enthusiastic team will allow you to surpass your professional and personal goals. Let's look at some of the questions frequently asked about the hiring process.

Where do you start when you initiate the hiring process for an orthodontic practice?

Start with your own personal vision for your practice, what would you like to accomplish? Why did you become an orthodontist? What are your practice goals, what would you like to leave as your legacy? Write a mission statement that reflects your vision for the practice, today and in the future. Once you determine what you want for your practice, the next step is to surround yourself with quality individuals that understand and share your philosophy and goals.

It is important to determine what exactly you need before you start the hiring process. Have in place a detailed job description for the new employee, establish the required qualifications, hours, benefits and the personality type of the individual that would best fill the needs of your practice. You also want to decide if you are hiring for one specific position or if you are looking for an individual who can multi-task.

How much information do you need to have available at the initial contact regarding salary and benefits?

Orthodontic practices today are competing against the corporate world to find quality employees who are looking for a long term career, not just a job. Establishing your office benefits (salary, vacation, sick pay, medical insurance, retirement, etc.) will allow you to sell your practice and the position to potential candidates.

What characteristics would you look for in an individual that would be working at your front desk?

The person who answers the telephone and greets patients is often the first contact a patient has with your practice. It is important to find someone who has an outgoing personality, is able to multi-task and has excellent telephone skills. You also want to find someone who is very organized, can keep track of patient charts, outgoing correspondence and pertinent paperwork. They must have a smile that comes across telephone lines.

Would you look for a different type of person for the financial position or for the role of the treatment coordinator?

When searching for a financial coordinator, I recommend tapping into the banking industry. Individuals who have been employed by a financial institution often are good with numbers and find it easy to communicate with people regarding financial concerns. The primary and most important characteristic I look for in a treatment coordinator is personality plus. With time and patience you can train almost anyone to understand the technical requirements of the position, however it is impossible to train the personality. You want to find an individual who is a natural salesperson, someone who loves to communicate, has excellent listening skills and is diligent with follow through.

How do you evaluate a candidate for a clinical position in your office?

If you are practicing in a state that requires your clinical assistants to be licensed, ask that they bring a copy of the document to the initial interview. Give them the paperclip test, give them a piece of straight wire and watch them bend it into a paperclip. This will give you an indication of their small motor skills. Often I will ask a potential clinical employee to give me sample patient instructions that given after an initial banding to analyze their communication skills.

How do you find potential employees?

There are several methods available today that open the doors to potential quality employees. Often orthodontists will use the 'word of mouth' technique. Be observant while out in the community, network with colleagues and patients, and ask current employees for possible recommendations. If you receive outstanding service in the community while at a bank, store or restaurant, evaluate whether that individual could be an asset to your office.

Classified advertisements in the newspaper are so expensive, is there another option that can be used?

Internet advertising for employees has become almost the method of choice for many doctors. The ads are sorted by region and position and websites such as www.dentalworkers.com and www.craigslist.org specialize only in the dental field. Applicants e-mail their resumes directly to the office and the response is immediate. New applicant resumes are posted daily. One of the best features is that the cost is approximately 25% of traditional yellow page advertising.

Are there any helpful hints to maximize the results of an advertisement in the classified ads?

If you post a job opening in the newspaper, make sure that your ad contains words or phrases that are innovative and tantalizing (team player, high achiever, human engineering skills, enjoys a challenge.) Have a primary ad and place teasers in different sections of the paper. This maximizes your financial

investment. Ask the applicants to fax their resume to your office rather than accept telephone calls.

Once you receive a resume that looks promising, what would be the next step?

Conduct a telephone interview with the applicant. Listen carefully to their verbal skills; ask open ended questions that cannot be answered with a yes or a no. Inquire about their short term and long term goals. Listen carefully to determine if they are looking for a job for seeking a career in the orthodontic field. Evaluate their employment history. Red flags to look for are job hopping, short term employment records and negative comments regarding previous employers.

Are there any questions that you legally cannot ask a potential employee?

Legally there are several questions that you cannot ask a potential employee. Following is a summary of questions not to ask:

- How old are you?
- Are you married?
- What is your citizenship?
- What is your sexual orientation?
- How much do you weigh?
- Are you disabled?
- When did you graduate from high school?
- Do you have children?
- When were you born?
- What country are you from?
- Have you ever been arrested?
- Where were you born?
- Would your religion prevent you from working on weekends?

What is the next step after the telephone interview if you are interested in possibly hiring this person?

The next step would be an in-office interview. The first test is determine whether the candidate arrived on time and came fully prepared for the interview. Was their appearance neat and professional? Ask them to complete a screening form that will allow you to evaluate their handwriting and writing skills. In chatting one

and one with the individual do they come across as confident in their abilities and are they excited about what they can offer you and your practice? If they pass with flying colors, schedule a working interview.

Should you check prior business and personal references?

Typically I will check references after the in office interview and before the working interview. Always ask the candidate if you can call their current employer. Remember however that most companies will only tell you whether that person had been employed with them. The question to ask is 'would you rehire this individual?'

What exactly is a working interview?

A working interview allows you to observe the candidate while they are interacting with team members and patients. Are they willing to jump in and help or do they stand back and watch? How does your current team relate to the individual, are they relaxed and friendly or cautious? End the working interview with a lunch with the team only, no doctors allowed. Conversation during the meal often will give added insight to the personality of the potential employee. Questions you legally cannot ask will often be answered in casual table conversation.

Do you pay the applicant for the working interview?

Typically doctors will pay an applicant for the hours spent at the working interview. You can pay them as a 1099 non employee and avoid filing social security and withholding for the minimal time.

If everyone on the team agrees and you decide to hire the individual, how do you transition them into the position?

Assign one person the responsibility of training the new employee. They will work closely with the new person, giving them daily and weekly reviews. Have a formal review at 30 days, 60 days and again at 90 days at the end of the probationary period.

What documents should you have for your employee files?

Employee files should contain the following documents:

- Job description
- Medical information
- Hepatitis vaccine status

- Emergency contacts
- Receipt of office handbook
- Receipt of office key
- Copies of licenses, CPR, etc.
- Copies of performance reviews (written and verbal)
- Salary information

Always keep employee files under lock and key. Do not allow anyone else to have access to the files other than yourself and your human resource manager.

It takes so long and it is expensive to find and hire new personnel. How does a doctor keep quality employees?

It is been determined that to hire and train a quality employee, it costs a business approximately \$25,000. Once we have an outstanding team member on board, it is important that we do everything possible to keep them. An orthodontist must show pride in the organization and be considered a respected and fair supervisor. Compensation and benefits must be fair and competitive. Employees must feel affiliation with the organization and know that their position is meaningful and important. This is not just a job; it is a long-term exciting and rewarding career.

In closing, it is important that you get the new employee off to a good start. Create a fantastic environment- be a boss whom employees respect. Share information with your team. Give your employees as much autonomy as they can handle, challenge them to stretch. Be flexible and design the jobs to encourage long term retention. Identify possible defectors early. Change will always happen, don't run from it but rather embrace it as it will lead to a better future. Remember that 'success is a journey, not a destination.'

Debbie Best, co-founder and a senior practice management consultant for Consulting Network, evaluates staffing needs and the office computer system to develop a strategic plan for practice productivity. She designs customized schedules, personalized job descriptions, and a personnel manual to fit each practice's needs. As a part of her consulting program, Debbie also focuses on the role of the front desk team, financial controls, anti-embezzlement protocol and practice building.

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