HIRING DENTAL STAFF TIPS – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

One area of the dental practice that we consistently find to be a problem (or an unknown) is hiring the right personnel who can do the work involved in their job as well as maintain good people skills. There are many steps involved in hiring personnel, but one area that is consistently weak is conducting a good interview. A good interview is one that results in confidence that you are choosing the right person for your practice. There are other steps included in the process, but here is a simple outline of the interview itself:

1) Review the application or resume briefly. You can comment on various doctors you may know that they have worked with or other comments to begin opening communication with them (some people are very nervous being interviewed, and calm down dramatically after they are hired, some are always nervous, and one has to pay very close attention to see which it is, and do everything possible to put them at ease). Be certain that they have references on the resume/application from places they have worked before, not only personal references. You will be calling and checking on these before hiring.

2) Ask pertinent questions regarding experience as shown on the resume/application, some examples for different positions might be:

   What expanded duties did you do at Dr. ______'s office?
   What software are you familiar with?
   What brand of implants have you assisted on?
   Per OSHA regulations how do you sterilize instruments?

   What experience do you have calling recall?
   How do you ensure the schedule is full?
   If an insurance company has not paid after 4 weeks what do you do?
   How have you handled financial arrangements in the past?
   What is the most important part of scheduling patients?

   How do you help sell treatment as a hygienist?
   Have you ever sold home care equipment (Rotadent, Sonicare, etc)? What were the results?
   Are you comfortable doing deep scaling and root planing?
   How many patients can you do regular prophys on in a day?

3) Ask questions that may give you some better idea of what their personality is like, or how willing they may be. Some examples might be:

   How do you feel about handling new patients?
   Do you like being paid bonuses based on increased production, or prefer hourly pay raises?
   How do you feel about working overtime when necessary?
   Why do you prefer working in a practice rather than a retail shop or other business?
   How do you feel about regular staff meetings?
   Do you prefer a fast paced practice or one that sees only a few patients per day? Why?

   If they have children*:

   Do you have someone else who can pick up your children if you have to work overtime?
   Would you have to miss work if your child was sick or do you have someone else who can care for them?
You may be surprised at the wide variety of differences you'll see in people interviewing in this way. Asking the same questions of each applicant gives you a much better idea of how different people react on the same questions. You will want to note down answers on the resumes/applications to these questions (or use the Interview Questions page at the end of this write-up). You can make your own list of questions as well, but you should have a reference list of standard questions to go by while doing these interviews. Pay attention to how long it takes people to answer. Some people will not directly answer questions, some will go on and on about things and then finally answer, some will answer directly. How long it takes them to answer can tell you much about how they will do at following instructions, how many times you may need to repeat instructions to get them understood and done, and how they will fit in with the rest of the staff.

Before the interview itself, you should have them write an essay on “Why do you think you are uniquely qualified for this job?” During the interview you should also read their essay and ask them something about it, whether it is a question about what they meant about something written that you didn't fully understand, or a comment about what they stated. Get some discussion going on this and see if they stick to the concept(s) they wrote down or not. This is also an indicator of what you can expect from them. Pay attention to whether you can read their handwriting or not, and how their spelling and grammar are. This is important whether they are going to be writing in charts for you, or writing letters at the front desk.

These interviews should run ten to 15 minutes per applicant. Any longer than that, you will forget more than you remember about each applicant. The interview space should be private with no interruptions, and also so that no other waiting applicant overhears the questions and has time to think about them before they are asked.

The above process reduces the amount of valuable executive and doctor time to attain the result of knowing whether the person should go onto the next step or not. A one page list of all of these questions is attached to this write up for your ease of use. After the interview, the next step is to conduct a “working interview,” where the prospective employee comes in for a day or a half-day, so you can see that they can perform what they say they can, and to see interactions with your staff. Staff can be encouraged to take the applicant out to lunch and get to know them a bit.

Again, the interview itself will not tell you everything you need to know about an applicant. Doing the working interview and checking references will give you more data. Also, always hire new staff on a probationary basis. Do not keep someone in your practice just to have a “warm body.” Choose well, but it is better to not have anyone in a position than to have someone who is not right for you and your patients.

If you are having continual problems in this arena, GET SOME HELP! Call Pacific Management or (heaven forbid) some other consulting firm, or a Human Resources expert or attorney, and develop a plan that works for your needs!

* Note: The “Americans With Disabilities Act” states that you cannot directly ask if a prospective employee has children. The theory is that it could lead to job discrimination. A good labor law attorney should be contacted before asking this type of question to see what your legal limitations and freedoms are regarding discrimination.
Sample Interview Questions

Assistant:
What expanded duties did you do at Dr. ______’s office?

What brands/kinds of cements/bonding materials are you familiar with?

Per OSHA regulations how do you sterilize instruments?

Explain how you handle a patient who shows signs of being afraid.

Reception/Scheduling:
What experience do you have calling recall?

How do you ensure the schedule is full?

What software are you familiar with?

What is the most important part of scheduling patients?

Financial Coordinator:
If an insurance company has not paid after 4 weeks what do you do?

How have you handled financial arrangements in the past?

Have you done electronic billing? (If yes: which clearing house did you use?)

How do you handle a patient that claims they do not have the money to do the procedure?

Hygienist:
How do you help sell treatment as a hygienist?

Have you ever sold home care equipment (Rotadent?, Sonicare?, etc)? What were the results?

Are you comfortable doing deep scaling and root planing?

How many patients can you do regular prophys on in a day?

General questions that may give you some better idea of personality or willingness:
How do you feel about handling new patients?

Do you like being paid bonuses based on increased production, or prefer hourly pay raises?

How do you feel about working overtime when necessary?

Why do you prefer working in a practice rather than a retail shop or other business?

How do you feel about regular staff meetings?

Do you prefer a fast paced practice or one that sees only a few patients per day? Why?

Optional: If they have children*:
Do you have someone else who can pick up your children if you have to work overtime?

Would you have to miss work if your child was sick or do you have someone who can care for them?