



How to Interview and Hire the Best Dental Team Member for Your Practice

Our HR expert, Corina Sibley, gives us her top tips for finding those stellar employees.

Many of us who have the ability to hire employees have made hiring mistakes in the past. The costs to a practice for a bad hire include productivity loss, damaged morale and training and recruiting costs. According to Michael Watkins, in his book *The First 90 Days*, the cost to employers of turnover among new hires earning less than \$100K can be as high as 14 times their annual salary. Using the example of hiring a dental assistant, let's walk through some of the key steps that will help increase the odds of a successful hire.

Defining the job

Think about the role you are looking to fill. Things to consider are:

- Do you need someone experienced or will a new graduate do?
- Does this person need to be able to work flexible hours?
- Do you have an office manual that provides a clear list of the duties and responsibilities of this position?
- What are the minimum qualifications acceptable for the position?
- Create a job posting that advertises the specific role to your targeted candidate base.

Screening Candidates

Narrow down the number of résumés by initially screening for minimum qualifications and closest match. Narrow the candidates still further by conducting phone screens to learn about salary expectations, availability, and an initial score on the core competencies for the role.

Interviewing

The premise of the behavioural interview is “past behaviour indicates future behaviour.” Questions are aimed at collecting information about what a candidate did in a particular situation in the past; not what she or he would do in a simulated scenario. By picking three or four core competencies and then defining one or two questions per competency, you will be able to collect enough data in an interview to assess that individual. Below are sample questions that will help assess the skills and fit of an experienced candidate. For new graduates or for candidates who have been out of the workplace for a few years, you can use the same type of questions as below, just change the wording appropriately. For example, describe a situation in which you had to work with a difficult peer on a recent school project. How did you handle it? What types of initiatives have you implemented in one of your volunteer roles?

A Sample Interview

Interpersonal skills

- Describe a situation in which you had to work with a very difficult co-worker, dentist or patient. How did you handle it?

Core competencies are groupings of knowledge, skills and abilities that are critical to job success (e.g. team player, organizational skills, and customer service orientation).

Communication skills

- We have all been in a situation when we misunderstood someone. Tell me about a time when this happened to you. What happened? What happened as a result? What, if anything, would you do differently?

Initiative and can-do attitude

- Have you implemented any new procedures or techniques into your job recently? Describe them and why and how you implemented them.

Proven team player

- At your past clinic, how did you go about building relationships with each member of the team?

Organizational skills

- In your current position, outline how you organize your day, set your priorities and go about your daily routine.

You want to get as much specific information as possible. If you hear responses such as “I usually...”, “generally, I”, “we tried to...” this is your cue to probe further and ask specifically what the candidate themselves did, what their particular role was, what actions they took, etc.

Ask all candidates the same set of questions (and avoid asking illegal questions). This will enable you to compare the data and pick the best candidates based on how they scored on the competencies.

Reference Checking

It is critical to conduct reference checks prior to making an offer and it is advisable to obtain the candidate's written permission before doing so. The collection of personal information, including the views and opinions offered about an individual during a reference check, is subject to the various privacy laws in Canada. Ensure your candidate provides three professional references, including at least two supervisors. It is important to guarantee the confidentiality of reference checks, so you will want to assure reference providers that your conversation with them is confidential, and then honour that. Be sure that your questions only cover job-related topics; the same legal do's and don'ts apply to reference check questions as to job interview questions.

A solid response is a **STAR** response whereby the candidate indicates the **S**ituation, **T**ask, **A**ction and **R**esult.

Legal Do's and Don'ts of Interview Questions

It is illegal to question candidates regarding:

- Race, colour, ancestry
- Disability
- National origin, place of birth, age
- Marital status, pregnancy, children
- Personal family issues or child care provisions
- Political activities or membership
- Religion
- Sexual orientation or preferences

It is legal to ask candidates:

- If they can perform the job
- How they would perform aspects of the job

To Facebook or Not to Facebook

There has been some recent controversy over employers asking candidates for their Facebook passwords as part of the reference-checking process. This practice contravenes Canadian privacy laws and is in no way sanctioned. However, you can certainly search in public domains, such as Google and LinkedIn, for information on candidates. In a statement in the *Financial Post*, lawyer Mark Ellis, of Baker & McKenzie, confirmed that, “While an employer's review of outward-facing social media pages is proper and valuable due diligence, probing beyond the password-protected wall constitutes unwarranted invasion of privacy.”¹

It may seem like a lot of time invested upfront to follow the steps outlined above, but what you save by avoiding the cost and time lost of hiring the wrong person, far outweighs the work.

1 <http://business.financialpost.com/2012/05/03/privacy-commissioner-facebook-passwords-off-limits-to-employers/>

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