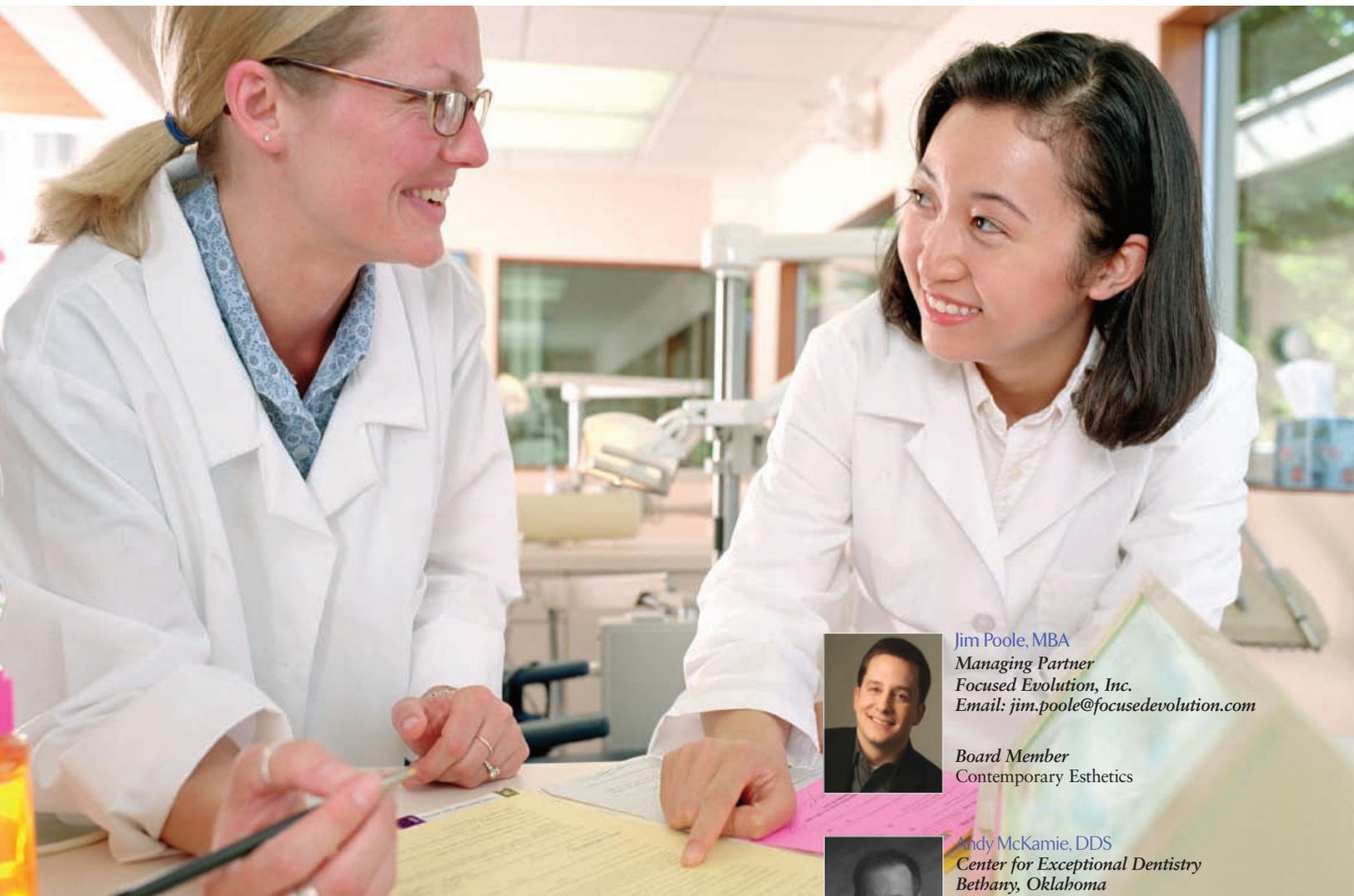


How to Manage Your Most Valuable Asset...Your People



According to *Webster's Dictionary*, a dentist is “someone whose profession is the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of diseases of the teeth and gums.” The craft of dentistry is part art and part science, but the business of dentistry is all about people. Dentistry is a service business. How well you serve your community is up to you, your leadership, your management, and most importantly, your team. The only true competitive advantage you have as a dental business is your team. Your facility, technologies, products, techniques, and location can all be copied by a competitor. Placing the right people in the right jobs performing the right tasks is a formula for success.



Jim Poole, MBA
 Managing Partner
 Focused Evolution, Inc.
 Email: jim.poole@focusedevolution.com

Board Member
 Contemporary Esthetics



Andy McKamie, DDS
 Center for Exceptional Dentistry
 Bethany, Oklahoma
 Phone: 405.789.7893
 Email: rjmckamie@hotmail.com

Partner
 Pinnacle Practices, Inc.

Board Member
 Contemporary Esthetics



Randa O'Connor
 Partner
 Pinnacle Practices, Inc.
 Phone: 214.654.0111
 Email: randa@pinnaclepractices.com

Hiring People

Hiring your team is one of the most important tasks you will perform as a dental business owner. Hiring people is not easy. It takes time, patience, and a clear understanding of what you want from a new employee. Before you begin interviewing candidates you should document the following wish list.

Personal Characteristics

This is the most important piece to the human puzzle. You can always train people on specific skills, but you can't change their character. Don't be disillusioned by an experience-rich resume when cultural fit and personality are paramount. We have all experienced the effect "1 bad apple" can have on a team. With the knowledge of your team, culture, and environment, prepare for your interviews by listing desired personal traits in hierarchical order. For example, when hiring for front office staff, search for someone who likes people, is easy to communicate with, and is friendly, confident, empathetic, optimistic, and persistent. Follow your instincts in the interview—your intuition will guide you away from the wrong people.

Experience

Be clear with your expectations for minimum experience required and the level of experience desired. Screening candidates based on minimum thresholds of education and experience will save you time and effort and narrow the applicant pool. There is a direct correlation to experience and the amount of training that will be required. Our recom-

mendation is to hire the less-experienced candidate if he or she fits your personality profile and be prepared to invest in training.

Accountabilities

A dental practice is a busy place with lots of moving parts. You won't have time to micromanage your practice, so you will need to trust and rely on your team. Clear expectations and communication of accountabilities among your team members will drive your success. The first step is to have written job descriptions for every role within your practice. The job description should include daily activities, responsibilities, and accountabilities and should be consistent with your practice's philosophy and business objectives. These job descriptions should be understood by your entire team. In fact, if you want your team to have a sense of accountability to each other, you should share every job description openly at a staff meeting. There should be no surprises or hidden responsibilities.

A team member should be held accountable by the measurements that are put in place. Without measurements to guide progress, it is difficult to hold people accountable. For example, the team member who is responsible for collections should be held accountable to work hard to achieve the goal, track progress against the goal, report progress to the team, problem solve with the team if needed, and implement any tactical changes. Businesses struggle when employees don't know what they're supposed to be doing, what their priorities are, and how to measure their success.

The Interview Process

Hiring a new team member should be an inclusive process, not one that is done by the dentist alone. Your dental team should be empowered and trained to interview candidates. Everyone on the interview team should have a clear understanding of the desired personal characteristics, experience, and the role's accountabilities. The transition period for a new team member is easier when the team is involved and there is general consensus that the best candidate was chosen.

Pinnacle Practices, Inc has an interesting hiring methodology. Pinnacle's philosophy is to perform a group interview and to hire for attitude and train for dentistry. A Pinnacle consultant will set up a 2-hour group interview. The candidates are not informed that it will be a group interview. The dental team will observe and take notes. Candidates are asked several questions (introduction, strengths, weaknesses, definition of a team, etc) that are answered in front of the group. The dental team observes the candidate's eye contact, confidence, energy, and their ability to handle pressure, articulate their thoughts, and stand out in a crowd. This unique interviewing environment allows the dental team to see more candidates (typically 10 to 50) and compare candidates side by side. Candidates are then given a written set of interview questions that includes their desired salary and why they feel that they are the best candidate. Once the group completes the interview, the dental team debriefs and chooses a couple of candidates to come in for one-on-one interviews.

Training People

Congratulations on hiring a new team member. Now that you have gone through the time and effort to hire someone, the real effort begins. The first month on the job is the most important training time for a new team member. New team members don't have any "baggage" associated with your practice. They are energized, nervous, impressionable,

and ready to learn. Just like any business, you should have a new-employee training protocol in place. The training protocol should be managed by your training team, consisting of the dentist and a couple of veteran team members. The dentist should be responsible for training on the vision, mission, and goals of the practice, treatment philosophy, business philosophy, and job performance expectations. The rest of the training team should be responsible for training on logistics, daily activities, and defined training needs. A strengths-and-weaknesses assessment should be performed by the training team to identify specific training needs (eg, computer skills, clinical skills, etc). A training schedule should be developed and managed by the new team member as well as an identified training mentor. The mentor should be held accountable for ensuring that the training needs are met in order of priority.

“Don't tell people how to do things; tell them what to do and let them surprise you with the results.”

—George S. Patton, Army General

and ready to learn. Just like any business, you should have a new-employee training protocol in place. The training protocol should be managed by your training team, consisting of the dentist and a couple of veteran team members.

The dentist should be responsible for training on the vision, mission, and goals of the practice, treatment philosophy, business philosophy, and job performance expectations. The rest of the training team should be responsible for training on logistics, daily activities, and defined training needs. A strengths-and-weaknesses assessment should be performed by the training team to identify specific training needs (eg, computer skills, clinical skills, etc). A training schedule should be developed and managed by the new team member as well as an identified training mentor. The mentor should be held accountable for ensuring that the training needs are met in order of priority.

Training for existing team members also should include a strengths-and-weaknesses assessment. Each practice should have a training man-

ager who is responsible for assisting team members with their respective training needs. Training equals evolution. Your staff is going to need continuous education and training on computer software, clinical techniques, business processes, etc. Training must include more than traditional classroom learning opportunities. Your team members also must learn and grow through experiential assign-

ments. Stretch your employees in new directions whenever the occasion presents itself. It is enriching, rewarding, and inexpensive. From our collective experience, dental practices that continuously challenge their team members to improve and invest in education and training are the practices that achieve the highest levels of success and job satisfaction.

Managing People

Your dental business success is predicated on your ability to manage your team. A single plan for management success does not exist, but there are 3 fundamental principles that can guide you.

Communication

You must be able to articulate the needs of your business and your expectations regarding job performance. Communicating with clarity, compassion, and candor wins. Your team deserves to know with clarity what is expected of them. When expectations are not met, it needs to be addressed. Conflict resolution is difficult; however, conflict is inevitable,

and playing nice doesn't win—it only enables antagonists to get away with more and diminishes team morale. One way to manage conflict is to address behaviors and actions without attaching emotion. For example, when questioning an employee about his or her phone skills, try stating, "Yesterday, I overheard you on the phone with a patient and your tone didn't appear to be friendly...can you tell me about this?" It is important to allow people to feel that they are being heard and not feel like they are being unjustly accused without all of the facts.

Accountability

Each team member should possess a clear understanding of their role, respective accountabilities, and reporting relationships. Accountability is not punishment, it is measurement. Your team should know how they are being measured and they should meet with you regularly (at least annually) to review their job performance. If they are exceeding their performance, they should be rewarded personally. If they are underperforming, then an action plan should be developed, agreed on, and executed. The action plan and progress should be documented and discussed at least quarterly. If there is no improvement, then clearly your practice is not the right place for that person. When a team member's poor performance must be addressed before an annual review, we recommend this 4-step process:

1. **Expectations:** Document your expectations to the team member.
2. **Agreement:** If step 1 does not work, sit down and verbally define where the team member is not meeting the expectation. Both parties have equal say in this meeting.

3. **Contract:** If step 2 does not work, sit down with the team member and write out a specific contract that describes expectations. Both parties sign this document.
4. **Confrontation:** This is the team member's last chance. As the business owner, you have total control of this meeting. If immediate improvement is not seen, then organizational changes need to occur.

Flexibility

Each team member is different. They have different genetics, experiences, goals, dreams, ways of being motivated, and ways of being managed. Some employees seek affiliation or friendship in the workplace. Others seek achievement—they want to accomplish something new and exciting. Another motivator is power. Some individuals appreciate authority and rewards in the workplace. It is your responsibility as the leader of your dental business to get to know each team member and to gain an understanding of how to effectively manage them. Flexing your management style to the unique personalities of your team members is more effective than imposing your will on them. Your team is the most valuable asset of your dental business. The more time and effort you invest in learning how to effectively manage your team members, the harder they will work for you.

Terminating People

Terminating a team member is not easy, for either party; however, it may be necessary for both. When someone is consistently not meeting expectations, everyone knows it—he or she knows it, you know it, and your entire team knows it. Under-

performing affects the entire business and undermines morale. Terminating that “1 bad apple,” no matter how difficult the prospect may be, will send valuable messages to your team.

- You are in charge and aware of workplace situations
- You pay attention to performance
- You value performance and dismiss employees who do not meet expectations

Managing people can be a lonely position and is certainly not a popularity contest. Remember, this is not about you. It is about running a solid business, and people are your most valuable asset. When terminating a team member, it is important to put on your business face while maintaining your humanity. The following are guidelines for the termination process:

- Have a legitimate business reason for termination
- Collect all relevant materials (eg, performance reviews, attendance records, documentation of poor performance, warnings [written or verbal])
- Have a paycheck cut and ready for any severance pay or vacation pay
- Prepare what you are going to say in advance of the meeting
- Know your business's and state's employment policies (contact the state unemployment office)
- Discuss termination only with relevant team members (not a peer) shortly before termination
- Ensure that a witness (identified relevant team member) is in the room with you during termination
- Appreciate the person's contribution to the workplace
- Outline how the person's strengths do not match the workplace's needs

- Give the person a few minutes to grasp the situation
- Listen to the person's responses and answer appropriate questions regarding only their job performance, not personality traits
- Avoid arguing with the person or discussing other team members
- Allow the person to leave with dignity; however, minimize their time to voice discontent with other team members
- Collect all business-related materials, such as keys and passwords, from the person
- Honor the person's confidentiality (in most cases, it is the law) when discussing his or her absence—a simple “Jane Doe is no longer with the practice” suffices
- In many states it is illegal to inform future employers of the reasons for the person's termination—you may simply say that you would or would not rehire.

Terminating a team member can be humiliating for that person and stressful for all involved. Do it with dignity, do it expeditiously, and do it professionally.

Conclusion

The dental industry is all about people. You are going to build a business focused on serving people in your community, and that service element comes from you and your team. You have invested years in the education of your craft. Now is the time to invest in the people around you who will enable you to leverage your education and practice dentistry for many years to come. Don't underestimate the importance of your team. Simply put, your team members are the key to your success. Good luck! ©