

# THE ART OF HIRING

## *registered dental assistants*

MEMBER ARTICLE | BY LILSON CURL, FAADOM



These days, finding and maintaining good employees has become an even bigger challenge than ever before.

I start with the local dental assistant schools in my area. We prefer to train the staff ourselves. It is easier not to break bad habits and just start with a clean slate. Establish a good working relationship with the school's placement counselor and be honest about what you want. We need to be smarter than the average bear, with no room for fluff! Even though a fingerprint and background check is now required by the state for a dental assistant license, we have always paid out of pocket for the last twenty years for background check and drug testing. I use the same agency that performs testing for the state of Texas. Our dental practice is located in a white collar community, and I have been questioned by patients, before they come in the door, about the safety of their information. I also pay for 24-hour monitoring on our software system by the technology group we have under contract. I

let the dental assistant school's placement counselor make the initial selection by sending me resumes to review. I start with phone interviews, asking the recruit to bring in their vaccination records. Hiring staff from all over the world, I have found that their shot records far surpass what we require in the United States. The next step is letting the new recruit come into the office to meet the clinical staff and ask them to share their opinions to make the final decisions. The existing registered dental assistants (RDA) train the new recruits. They are much more stringent during the hiring process than I am because they know what is expected and they don't want to waste their time. I had one senior assistant go through seven recruits before she selected one. She was correct; the RDA she selected was very hard-working. I have also created training manuals over the years, starting out with an RDA who wanted to go to dental school. I had her write the manual, and have had staff add to the



training/procedure manual every year. However, staff members are not allowed to copy the manual or take it home. I have them go through the manual every year for changes. Depending on the RDA, I decide on the salary rate and how quickly I think they can learn. I have had foreign dentists work here as RDAs because they were trying to learn how we do things in America. They also eventually went to dental school programs here in Texas for international dentists. We are a general dental office that does sedation and dental implants, and all work very hard, are very fast paced and accurate. New RDAs are supervised very closely with every procedure they perform.

ART OF HIRING CONTINUED | PAGE 21

...ART OF HIRING CONTINUED

“Teach One, Do One.” They watch us and we watch them. Remember, it doesn’t matter that they are new; you are still responsible for everything they do in the workplace. I have had many hygienists work here over the years, and the one comment they have always made is, “Your RDAs work very hard.” They are very helpful because the hygienists also have the RDAs assist them. Due to Covid, we currently don’t have a hygienist; the dentist is performing all the cleanings and the RDAs are certified to perform polishing. It is an ideal way to keep the staff numbers down in the office and it gives the dentist something to do when Covid numbers are high and patient appointments slow down. The dentist gets to spend more time with the patients and treatment plans are more productive. RDAs get paid a little more because they are polishing the patients’ teeth.

Also, one thing I have learned over the years is to only keep employees that fit with our dynamic. If they are not working out, cut your losses and don’t waste time by bringing the office down. Document! Document! Document! Do your reviews annually and be consistent in reviewing new personnel on a 30-, 60-, and 90-day probationary period. Let the RDA be aware of the situation in writing. Texas is a strong “employment-at-will” state. This means that either the employer or the employee may end the employment relationship without giving either notice or a reason. Work should be a pleasant place for everyone.

Treat everyone fairly and the patients will know this. Remember to take care of your patients, and they will take care of you! ■



### MEET THE MEMBER

Lilson Curl, FAADOM has been a dental office manager since 2003. She and her dentist husband, (who she has been proudly married to for 35 years), own Advanced Premier Dental and Implant Dentistry in The Woodlands, TX.

Lilson earned her BS in Marketing, from the University of Houston, and her MBA in Finance, from St. Thomas University. She holds nine Financial Security licenses and has worked as an auditor in banking and investments.

Lilson is a lifetime AADOM member and was inducted as an AADOM Fellow in 2013. She is currently pursuing her AADOM Mastership (MAADOM) and plans to be inducted into the 2022 class in September.

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