



THE EVOLUTION

of dental office staffing

| BY CHERYL BACH

It's 7:30 pm on a school night. I'm driving my son home from soccer and get a notification on my phone that a candidate just applied to a posting for our dental office. I pull over to review the candidate and reply immediately.

Yes. I am that desperate for good office help.

We all have our sob stories, right? We've been ghosted on interviews, had no qualified applicants respond to our "sponsored" job postings, hired an applicant who takes another job at the last minute and overpaid new hires who are less competent than current staff. Why? Because turnover is out-of-control, we are all competing for the same applicants and we can't even replace employees who are not up-to-par because there is no one with whom to replace them.

I have accepted the fact that the good old days of having twenty resumes to screen for my open position are far gone. My job requirements went from having dental office experience and familiarity with our practice management software to anyone with a brain and a pulse who will show up every day, on-time. I must

be willing to invest the time, effort and resources into training the right person and then pray they don't leave in a year and have to start all over.

I get it...post-pandemic there are fewer people willing to come to work every day. In the meantime, fee schedules are shrinking while the cost of labor, benefits, supplies, rent and everything else is increasing. Dental offices are being crunched. It is simply not sustainable.

I remember Tony Robbins (with his super white teeth) saying, "In life you need either inspiration or desperation." I think it is fair to say I was feeling quite desperate—maybe Tony was right.

While brainstorming with my boss, he suggested outsourcing tasks to someone who could answer phones, do insurance verifications, manage, and follow up on claims and do billing and collections. I was familiar with many of the companies that offered these services and started rattling off all the reasons why that wouldn't work for us: it's too expensive, I don't want patients talking to

someone in a "call center", the quality of work would suffer, our systems and processes are too customized and complicated, we need someone who does it "our" way, we don't have cloud-based software, our patients expect that "personal" touch....etc. I could go on and on.

Guess what...I was WRONG, WRONG and WRONG.

The post-pandemic workforce evolution has yielded high-quality and customized remote services for all sizes and types of dental practices.

My first question was, "How is this different or better than me letting my own person work from home?" Here is where things get good.

First, you don't have to spend your own time and money sourcing candidates. It's like the difference between having to shop, cook, and clean up dinner (that I don't have time to do in the first place) versus going out to a restaurant, with no wait and being served exactly what you order. It's awesome.

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I just told the remote workforce staffing company my job requirements and they provided me with a pre-qualified, well-experienced candidate who I could interview to ensure they were up to my practice's standards.

Second, my remote employee is not on my payroll even though they only work for my practice. My virtual worker is an employee of the remote staffing company. This means the remote staffing company takes care of the worker's payroll and benefits. It's like not having to pay the bill at the restaurant or tip the waiter! Another perk is that if there is ever an issue with my remote worker's performance I can just inform the remote staffing company and they will manage it for me or replace the person. This not only saves me the potential headaches from difficult conversations and documentation but also reduces liability for the practice.

Now I am sure you're thinking this level of service and resources must come at a very high cost (just like an expensive restaurant.) However, the cost for my remote worker was only \$18 per hour, all in! My practice was paying our receptionist \$20 per hour plus the cost of vacation days, sick time, holidays, health insurance, 401(k) and more—that fully-loaded rate was over \$37 per hour! This saved the practice almost \$40k per year in labor and expenses. It was like eating at a fancy restaurant with a bill from McDonalds. I was a hero!

Now, here is your free dessert: higher productivity and higher-

quality service. Prior to having a remote worker manage calls, patients often had to stand and wait for our receptionist to get off the phone. Also, patients calling in had to leave messages when we were busy. It was worse when someone called out. Patients were sometimes interacting with a very stressed-out office staff. Not anymore! My remote worker has no other distractions, so my patients receive immediate and focused service. Further, this takes so much stress off my in-office staff that it creates a better work environment which translates into better patient experiences. There are fewer errors and patients feel valued.

To make this staffing model successful the remote staffing company made helpful recommendations to make my phone and software systems remotely accessible. They also ensured everything was set up to remain HIPAA compliant. It was a lot easier than I imagined (which is saying a lot, since I am a technophobe).

This remote worker model worked so well that we ended up using it for billing, collections, insurance

authorizations and more.

As the dental industry continues to consolidate and larger dental service organizations are able to benefit from economies of scale and resources, the small to mid-sized practices need to maximize their competitive advantage of quality service through leveraging technology and strategic sourcing. In one last reference to my restaurant analogy, I challenge you to not eat at a chain restaurant for a week. What happened to the mom-and-pop restaurants? Unless they were able to provide better quality product and service and comparable prices, they went under. This is what is happening to the dental industry as well. Remote staffing is one way to effectively compete.

The company I used is called EZ Staffing Solutions (www.ezstaffolutions.com). They can be reached at: infoezstaffing@gmail.com. ■

MEET THE AUTHOR



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