

The Value of Exit Interviews

With the shortage of qualified dental staff today and the threat of the problem worsening in the coming years, dentists must use the route of discovery to learn why they lost key people in the past and how to avoid a reoccurrence in the future. With the cost of a key person, (and they are all key), at one year of that person's salary lost in down time and retraining time, it is hopeful that the turnstile of departing staff will come to a halt.

Unless a staff member is leaving for a good reason such as relocation, retirement or an illness that prevents on-going employment, employees rarely tell their employer the real reason for leaving. Obtaining this information in a non-threatening manner is the purpose of the exit interview. The benefit to the practice is to hopefully avoid loss of staff for the same reason by identifying unfavorable traits in the employer or co-workers, unfair policies, or unmet expectations. The benefit to the doctor is the discovery of such weaknesses of which they may be unaware. The benefit to the departed employee is that she/he leaves on a positive note of hopefully knowing she is alleviating the problem for co-workers and future staff.

The exit interview questions should be written, and presented to the departing employees in advance. The employee is asked to be as specific and honest as possible as to why the position did not meet their expectation. I recommend asking open-ended questions such as:

In your ideal job, how would it differ from the position you had with our practice?

How could we have benefited more by your contributions to our team?

How would you rate this practice on a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being best) in the following:

Ability to learn through proper training and orientation ____?

Ability to use your creativity and ideas to make the practice better ____?

Opportunity for professional growth through CE opportunities ____?

Teamwork of co-workers ____?

Leadership of owners ____ and upper management ____?

Respect from dentist(s) _____ and co-workers _____?

List three things I can personally do for future employees to make the office better.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

Thank you for the opportunity of having you on my staff.

Preferably, exit interviews will be done over lunch. If done in the private office it is recommended that a witness be present. In a public setting witnesses are not necessary but you run the risk of emotional feedback if the person is prone to crying when discussing sensitive issues. In the private office setting, if the witness is part of the reason for this person leaving, it is difficult at best, to discuss true feelings openly with the employer.

Exit interviews may not be part of the dental practice format simply because most dentists dislike confrontations. These interviews can be somewhat confrontational even if they remain positive. No one likes to see the “warts” of their personal behavior or practice evaluated and brought to the surface. Like any other confrontations however, they pave the way to a much healthier work environment.

Some practices have exit interviews with departed and lost patients. The questions can be similar in nature as the staff’s exit interview form.

What did you like best about our practice?

What did you like least?

How would you evaluate my fees ____low, ____average, ____high, ____very high?

How would you evaluate your dental care over the years? _____

How would you evaluate my staff _____? Is there anyone on my staff who stands out in your mind? _____ Good, _____ bad, and why _____?

Do you recall the names of anyone you have referred to me over the years?_____

What can I possibly do to avoid this problem in the future? Please elaborate

Again, even very nice confrontations are not easy, but with proper forms which are written in a non- threatening manner, they can be the best practice building system you add to your practice this year. In thinking about past departed employees and patients, you may have been able to repair broken relationships before they actually left the practice after learning how much the employer/dentist really cared. Getting feedback

(positive or negative) can be a tremendous practice builder that retains good employees as well as loyal patients.

To avoid the trap of hiring yet not retaining employees, make the exit employee and exit patient interviews part of your procedures. It will be amazing to see weaknesses you didn't know you nor the practice had come to the surface and be rectified.

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