

PRACTICELIFE

Get your associate dentist working for you

Laura Horton explains why and how to make associate dentists good for your practice

Over the last few years with all the doom and gloom surrounding the recession, there has been equal doom and gloom regarding associate dentists.

Via social media I have seen posts and conversations about the death of associate dentists and putting dentists onto sliding scales to ensure they make the practice profitable.

I firmly believe there are many fantastic associate dentists in the UK. However, many of these fantastic dentists are probably living in fear of losing their jobs.

Associate dentists are vital in larger practices more than ever, yet many principal dentists do not feel that they get the support they are looking for. If you are an associate dentist and your principal isn't happy, how do you know this?

If you are a principal dentist with an associate not meeting your needs, how do you deal with this?

Get the right people on the bus and in the right seats

I know that if there are problems with an associate dentist, nine times out of 10 it is always because the practice is lacking vision, or that vision hasn't been shared with the associate dentist. How are they meant to help you develop the practice when they don't even know where you're heading?

If you want to have a successful practice that is profitable, you need to have an empowered team, and that includes associate dentists

There is a fantastic quote from Jim Collins who wrote the book *Good to Great*, he states: 'Get the right people on the bus and in the right seats.' Too many practice owners quickly assume that their associate shouldn't even be on the bus!

If you want to have a successful practice that is profitable, you need to have an empowered team, and that includes associate dentists. It is essential that as a business owner you have a clear vision and that you communicate this vision with your team.

Financial management is equally as important, how do you really know if your associate dentist is profitable? You must know your numbers, how much does it cost you per-hour to run each treatment room?



Making your associate dentist profitable

If you have concerns that your associate dentist is not profitable, the first step is to ensure your financial management is in place. If your gut instinct is correct, the next step is to arrange a meeting with your associate dentist. At this meeting it's important that you show your vision and find out if they are on board. This is usually a positive experience and you will confirm that your dentist supports you and wants to be a part of your vision. The next step is to share the financials in relation to the cost associated to running their chair, and compare this to their pay.

This is often an eye-opener for the associate dentists. If they have no idea how much you need them to invoice through each month, how can they help you get there?

At this point many business owners decide to put their associate on a sliding scale. I completely disagree with sliding scales, they are unethical and put associate dentists in a situation that questions their ethics. Patient care is always the priority. It is much better to put your dentists on a flat percentage that can be from 42% to 45% depending upon the businesses needs. Again this comes

back to having strong financial management in place to make sure that you set the flat rate correctly.

Associate dentists are real assets to thriving dental practices, and never forget; one day they may wish to help you achieve your exit plan and buy your practice from you! **ID**



Laura Horton has worked in dentistry for more than 16 years and has an unrivalled passion and enthusiasm for treatment coordination, business and team development. In 2008 Laura left her full-time practice management role. Ever since, with her years of experience and vast amount of knowledge, Laura has been working with dental practices to help practices successfully reach its true potential.

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Everyone's talking about it. Are you using it?



"Heraeus' Venus Pearl is a great product. It handles really well and doesn't stick to instruments..."

Dr Jason Smithson
Pure Dental Health & Wellbeing



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