

# Front desk A team

**W**hat we want in life and what we get are usually two different things. The same often applies in practice with the front desk team or dental receptionists as they are more commonly titled.

Practice owners would like their front desk team to:

- Provide a fantastic patient experience
- Have strong verbal skills
- Follow systems for consistency and to avoid mistakes that can occur
- Convert new patients into the practice

Often the reality is that you have one team member who can do the above and the rest can do some aspects but not all. So how do you get that five-star team on the front desk? My advice is always to look at the role you have created as a business owner.

Do you have receptionists and want a front desk professional? Wonderful team members who represent you as professionals, who can all do the above to the same consistent standard? If so then a rebrand may be in order. You need your team to be proud of the job and what they do. The title receptionist is not a positive one.

Do they have to wear their own clothes or sit at the desk in pyjamas (scrubs)? When a patient walks into the practice it must be immediately clear who the team are through the branding of their uniform and the way they are presented. I do not feel it is fair for the front desk teams to wear their own clothes to work and it is not professional to have someone on the desk wearing scrubs as they really do look like pyjamas!

The environment that the team work in is important too, not just for them but also for the patient. Is there clutter around? The desk should be clutter free at all times, patients should not see a messy desk.

## SET EXPECTATIONS

Once you have dealt with the branding of the front desk team, the next step is to set expectations. What do you want them to do for you? Often the team do not know. Revise job descriptions and confirm which areas they are confident in. Training is always important and especially so if you want your team to all have great verbal skills. It is also important that the team understand 'why' you require systems to work in a certain way. An example would be how much it costs the business for every adjustment that you make to a patient's fixed appliances.

Let's say the cost is £100. You have a patient who you treatment planned to adjust every six weeks. A £860 cost in a 12-month period.

If the patient starts to get the reception desk to book in five-week reviews because they feel it is better for them and will be speed up treatment the cost soon increases to £1040 a year. If 100 patients do this the cost to the business is £18,000 PA. This is another salary.



Explain the results from clinical studies – arm your team with information to help them on the desk. Having the adjustment, a week earlier will not make any difference. If the patient can't make six weeks, then they wait seven weeks. If they can't make eight weeks you book for nine weeks and so on.

Many orthodontic practices are now marketing for private self-referred patients. This is a wonderful and an exciting time for you all. The one problem with this is that practices are investing money on marketing but not on the front desk team's skills to talk to new patients.

## UNTAPPED POTENTIAL

In orthodontics patients are potentially spending thousands with you. Every time that phone rings it could be £4000 at the end of the line. If you have not spent time with the team training them on how to answer calls or what they should say in response to questions they are asked, you maybe throwing money down the drain.

The main reason that practices do not have the A-team that they wish to have is down to one reason – time. If you do not have enough staff on the desk and your manager or the 'golden egg' (who you wish you could clone) does not have time to design what you would like, communicate this and train the team, then you will be left with a mish mash of people all working really hard, trying their best but still not pleasing you.

Recruiting a new team member is hard and can take six months to train them fully into your practice. If you do not have enough staff then you need to start recruiting now! The A star team can become a reality for you, if you have the right amount of team members and are ready to invest time into designing their role, communicating expectations and providing training when they need help.  

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

To find out more about Laura you can visit her website [www.horton-consulting.com](http://www.horton-consulting.com) email [laura@horton-consulting.com](mailto:laura@horton-consulting.com) or contact her directly on 07912 360779.



In this article **Laura** discusses the importance of the front desk team and how you can get an A-team

## FACTFILE

**Laura Horton** has been helping to support dental practices with their business and patient experience development for nine years. As a dental nurse Laura always loved the front desk and in her last practice was proud to manage a world class team. Laura worked has worked in dentistry for over 18 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 them successfully reach their true potential.