

The 'out of hours' hotel experience

IF YOU ARE OPEN OUT OF HOURS, MAKE SURE YOU ARE NOT RUNNING ON SKELETON STAFF, URGES LAURA HORTON

BIOGRAPHY

Laura Horton has worked in dentistry for 21 years and has an unrivalled passion and enthusiasm for treatment coordination, business and team development. Laura is a master at communicating with patients and provides training to dentists based on her grassroots knowledge and experience. Horton Consulting works with dental practices to motivate and inspire the leaders and team to deliver the vision of the owner(s) in a patient-centred business. Visit Horton-consulting.com or email laura@horton-consulting.com.



Have you ever arrived to check in to a hotel late at night? I do this fairly often since returning to work after maternity leave.

If I need to visit clients where an overnight stay is required, I tend to leave home after 7pm, arriving at my hotel quite late. Think back to your last late-night hotel check-in: how was the experience?

On arrival, I am often met by staff who are tired and lack energy. They are usually preoccupied watching television, reading a book or the newspaper, and sometimes they are carrying out other tasks – due to a lack of other staff on the same shift – leaving an empty reception desk.

After a long and tiring journey, having battled roadworks or 50mph limits, I am exhausted and this is not the friendliest greeting. I go up to my room feeling unwelcome and uncomfortable.

However, when I wake in the morning and come down for breakfast, I feel like I am in a completely different hotel. The experience is completely on brand, I am greeted by friendly, professional people who are doing a great job and this is why I feel like I am in a different place – all that has changed is the people.

Everything looks the same, but the staff have made it feel different, in a good way.

STAY ON BRAND

Why am I talking about hotel experiences? If you offer an 'out of hours' service by opening late or at the weekends, it can be hugely damaging for a brand if you don't get it right. Merely providing a convenient service is not enough, people expect more.

If you are open out of hours – late or at weekends – I recommend making sure you are not running on skeleton staff, as this can result in a lack of ambience and a dip in the standard of customer service that you usually provide.

Instead, ensure that you are running the extended hours with a team that works in the business during the normal hours of operation. This will ensure consistency in the standard of customer care you provide – the last thing any dental practice wants to be doing is offering a substandard service, whatever time of day.

Unlike at a hotel, remember that you won't have the second chance of seeing your patients at breakfast in the morning, so the lasting memory they will have of your practice will be that evening appointment where your receptionist was disgruntled and tired after a long day.

BUILDING YOUR TEAM

Using a skeleton staff for your out of hours appointments is as unfair on the team as it is on patients. It puts pressure on the individuals to carry out the responsibilities that would usually be undertaken by an extended team or senior members of staff, and can leave people feeling undervalued and unappreciated.

So how do you put together a

well-rounded, experienced team who wants to work for you during 'anti-social' hours?

Show your team members they are appreciated. People who know they are valued – because they are paid well, incentivised properly, offered flexible working hours, consulted about changes within the workplace, treated to team days or nights out etc – will actually want to help you provide the service you envisage.

I would also recommend choosing your extended hours wisely, by asking both your patients and staff. Knowing what patients really want will prevent you from being open 'too much'.

In addition, understanding when team members are willing to work will show them that you consider their needs, as well as those of the patients.

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It might make more sense all round to open early one morning, one evening, and reduced hours on a Saturday, rather than being 'open all hours'.

Providing your patients with a convenient service that allows them to attend appointments around their busy schedules is a huge plus point – and can set you apart from the competition. Just ensure you stand out for all the right reasons and none of the wrong ones.

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