

For the New Kid on the Block | by Colleen Huff

Members Corner

Colleen Huff has been in the dental field for 20 years. Her dental career began as a Customer Service Rep for Metlife Dental in Utica, NY. From there, a move to New Jersey introduced her to the world of dental offices and she has been there ever since. Colleen honed her office skills for about 7 years before taking on the world of Management in 2001. Colleen is the founder/president of the D.E.N.T.A.L. Study Group and is one of our first AADOM Ambassadors. With a strong belief in the value of networking and the sharing of knowledge, she continues to grow her study group and spread the word about AADOM. **AADOM Member since 2006.**

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ong, long ago in a galaxy far, far away, a Jedi master quested forth into a brave new world. Okay, maybe not a brave new world, but a least one that needs a person with a varied skills set.

Entering into a new position can be very intimidating, no matter what that position is or how confident you are at your job. We have all taken that step at some point in our lives. Going into an established practice as the new Practice Administrator is especially daunting. How you conduct yourself on that first day/week will set the tone for your time with the office.

I have done this twice in my career and have learned a plethora of things that work, and even more that do not work. The first time I stepped into the manager role, I was ill-prepared. I was under the impression that if you can do a job, then you can certainly manage a group of people doing that job. Boy, was I wrong. Keep in mind that AADOM was not born yet, so my resources were limited. I walked into a practice that had 3 offices, 15 years running and 40 women between all three places. Some of the lessons I learned have served me (and others) well over the years.

1. Make sure you understand the expectations of the practice owner(s). During your interview, be sure to interview him/her. You are unable to run a practice the way they want if you don't know who they are or where they want the practice to go. Have at least 1-2 meetings with your dentist before starting. Plan short and long term goals for yourself.
2. Bring your knowledge with you. Along with your acquired experience and skills, bring

your contacts and network of resources. Depending on the situation you are walking into, those first few weeks may have you scrambling to get things back in order. Remaining team members may not know things like where Mary ordered the toner. With an established group of resources, you can keep your stress level down and business flowing as usual.

3. Don't change anything during the first month. Yes, you need to make your workspace livable and rearrange things for yourself. I mean, don't change policy and procedures until you see the office run for a bit. Get to know the staff. Ask them what they like and what they would change. The dentist may be surprised to find out that the staff likes and dislikes the same things as he/she does. Keep a list during that first month. Have your Word program up and jot things down as they come up. I did this, and it not only helped me to prioritize things, but it also was great to look back and tweak things.
4. If you are replacing someone who has been there "forever," remember to be conscientious of this. You must be respectful of the patients and the staff and give them time to adjust. Don't take offense to "Oh, are you the new 'Debbie'—what happened to her? We loved her. Is she ok?" It will take almost a full year before you will stop hearing that on a daily basis. Remember, you have now moved their cheese (if you do not understand this line- Go & read "Who Moved My Cheese" by Spencer Johnson). You have

taken that safety net of "Debbie" away and they have to get to know you.

Our office has a unique blend of a general practice and a prosthodontist. Needless to say on our specialist day, we have a slightly older patient base coming in. AND, did they want to know who I was! They would stand at the desk and quiz me, "so how long have you been doing this? Where did you work before? Where is "Debbie"? Answer their questions. Reassure them that you are there to make their life easier and better. Reassure them that you will take as good of care of them as "Debbie" did. Ask about them and get to know them. The comfort they felt with the other staff was familiarity. Ask the staff for help on this. They know these patients better than anyone. Seek their advice also.

5. That brings me to the staff themselves. This is a very critical part of your job. My recommendation is watch and listen. Ask the staff what they feel works. Find out what they feel could be improved. Let them know that you value their professionalism, advice and years at the office. This is, once again, a time to keep notes for yourself. If you see something you feel could be improved upon, write it down. Watch daily to make sure that what you saw is not just a "sometimes" thing and that it really does need to be adjusted.

I have been very lucky in my current practice that the existing staff is some of the hardest working and most professional staff I have ever had the pleasure to work with.

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They have all been together a very long time and it shows. The level of professionalism is exemplary (and I am not just saying that because they are reading this.) Your staff is your biggest asset or your biggest liability.

If, however, you have come into a practice that has energy vampires who are not performing up to the standards your doctor wants, then keep good notes. When you have that staff member who is not on the same page as everyone else, communicate with the dentist first. Then give the staff member every chance to come up to the level where you need them to be. Along the way: Document, document, document. Always put your expectations in

writing and have them sign off on what you expect. Give warnings in writing. If they still don't rise to the occasion, then speak with the doctor. Make sure your reasons are concrete and precise. Remember that another change will cause upheaval in the office and be prepared for it. Talk with the rest of the staff on the first morning after they are gone. Put time aside to allow them to air any concerns and then explain again the goals of the practice that she/he was not able to complete. It is unfortunate when this happens, but it will also show the staff that the doctor is determined in his/her goal to make this practice the best it can be.

Being the one who is finding fault is a dif-

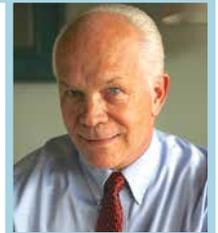
ficult and sometimes lonely job. That being said, none of us would be doing it if we did not love to see it all come together. Also remember—it all takes TIME. I am 1 ½ yrs. into this and many of my original plans for the first year have been placed onto this year's list. Set goals and don't beat yourself up if you don't meet all of them.

Take it slow—watch and listen. Remember the goals and talk with your doctor often. Make sure you are on the same page and working towards the same goal, and you will get there. As Christopher Robin reminded me as a child: "You're braver than you believe, and stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think." —A.A. Milne 🐻

Going Above and Beyond | by Bob Winn

Members Corner

Bob Winn is an Office Manager for an Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery practice in Pensacola, Florida. Bob retired from the U.S. Army having served 30 years as a Combat Medic, Dental Assistant, Hygienist and Dental Manager, capping his career as the Senior Dental NCO for the U.S. Army in Europe. Bob is a graduate of the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy; graduated Summa Cum Laude from Ashford University in Clinton, Iowa; and was awarded the Order of Military Medical Merit. Bob and his wife enjoy serving their church and spending as much time as possible with their 10 grandchildren. **AADOM Member since 2013.**



In the hustle and intensity of your life as an Office Manager, have you ever considered what more you can do to elevate your practice to be better than it is no? As you ponder that question, please remember that I'm not talking about unreasonable, costly, or lofty goals, as it is usually all we can do to keep the clinic together and avoid a life-changing audit. I'm speaking about simple things; no cost, no fanfare, but actions that pay real dividends to your practice in patient satisfaction.

First, like many dental practices, we have a very nice K-cup coffee maker in our waiting room for the express use of those accompanying our patients. Obviously, they can make coffee on their own, but when practicable a staff member, including myself, will offer to make coffee for them and ask what type of coffee they would like. We will chat a bit during the brewing process, giving us a chance to become familiar with them as a patient or simply as a neighbor, but that simple act really enhances their experience. They are always grateful and pleasantly surprised by that very personal service.

Another neat and helpful thing we have implemented is a modified valet service on

nasty, rainy days. As a sedated patient finishes treatment, we usually have those accompanying the patient pull their vehicle up under our porte cochere for ease of dismissal once the sedated patient is able to leave. On rainy days, however, the Surgical Assistant, upon approval from the patient's driver, alerts me and I retrieve the car for them. Once positioned in the porte cochere, I then wipe the car door down from any wetness and return the keys to the driver. Not only does this relieve the driver of a very wet and cold experience, but it's always met with a big smile and a grateful attitude from the one rescued from an otherwise unsavory task.

Yes, of course I'm soaked, but big deal! After 30 years in the Army, I've found that I won't melt or lump up from the rain and it really is a very helpful and simple thing that we can do for our beloved patients. Heads up, though; bring a change of clothes and have towels handy, as you may get very wet from the experience. Simply stated, this is a service that I prefer to provide to our patients and would never expect our assistants to do, since they must prepare for the next patient. This is not about me, but about serving those who

trust us with their treatment and who pay us well for the service we provide.

These are simply some thoughts and recommendations that you may consider for your practice as they have made a real difference for us. I've found that, in spite of being very busy myself, these initiatives only take a few minutes, but have paid off in many smiles, thanks and referrals from friends of those whom we have served and benefitted by these simple acts of consideration. It is important to always remember that going the extra step for a patient not only helps them, but brings value to a relationship built on mutual gratitude and good will.

Our practice continues to thrive and prosper for a number of reasons, including great oral & maxillofacial surgeons, a wonderfully bright and skilled staff, and a deep-seated commitment to our community to which we extend the most basic forms of service: respect and dignity. I sincerely hope these thoughts help you as you continue to serve the ones that pay the bills...your wonderful patients! I look forward to reading *your* ideas and thoughts about what I can implement to enhance our practice even more. 🐻