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## Strategic Recruiting

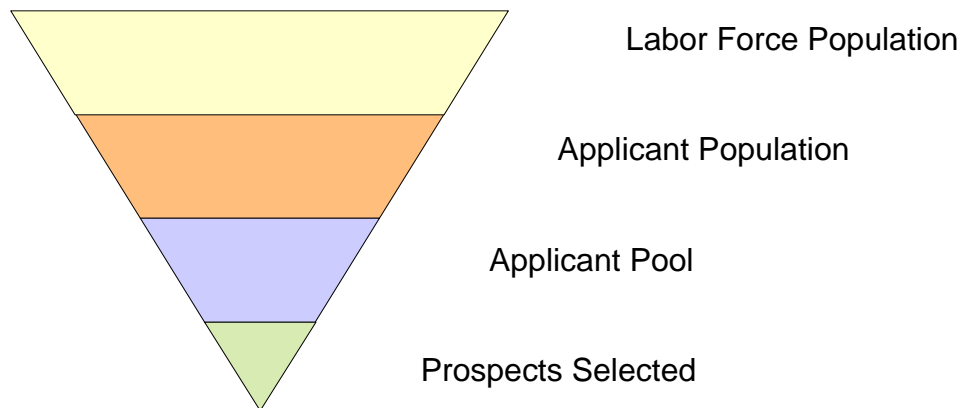
*Where are the dental employees we need?*

by

Ronald F. Arndt, DDS, MBA, MAGD

One of the greatest challenges to our dental practices today and likely to continue over the next decade will be finding, recruiting and retaining good employees with the skills necessary for jobs to be performed well. Even during times of economic slowdown, as well as in times of prosperity, shortages of well qualified dental employees are a concern for many dental practices. How do we find good, qualified candidates? Where are the workers? What can I do to locate as many quality candidates as possible when I need them?

First it will be important to define some simple terms. **Recruiting** is the process of generating a pool of qualified applicants for one of your positions. You will want to recruit as many applicants as possible to give you a wide range of choices.



**Labor markets** are the external supply pool from which you get to attract employees. In the labor market there is the **labor force population** that is made up of all the people who are available for selection if all possible recruitment strategies are used. That means if you look for people outside of the dental profession as possible candidates your labor force population gets huge. Should you decide to restrict your search to only those individuals with a dental background (*example, hygienists*) then your labor force population becomes much smaller. The **applicant population** is that group of people that are available for your position using a particular recruiting approach. For instance,

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you may be recruiting for a chairside assistant from your local vocational high school that has a dental assisting program. This recruiting method will result in a different group of applicants from those who might apply if you advertised openings in the newspaper indicating that no dental background is needed as you will train. The **applicant pool** consists of all individuals who are actually evaluated for selection. This includes all those people that you have visited with and screened prior to making a selection and job offer.

Dental staffing and recruiting is impacted by supply and demand as well as geographic markets where local and area labor markets vary significantly in terms of workforce availability and quality. If you have major employers like the auto industry in your community, likely you will have a decline in the number of applicants for positions in your office. In addition, the recruiting of quality staff is further challenged by educational and technical qualifications required by the dental profession. Because the dentist needs individuals with specific licenses (*dentists and hygienists*) and certifications or educational attainment levels (*expanded duty dental auxiliaries, radiology certification for all clinical team*) there is a tight labor market for these people.

So what do we do? How do we find the kinds of people we need to staff our teams? First step is to take a strategic approach to recruiting. That means that you will want to consider your practice objectives and strategies. Allocate the time to anticipate and manage the supply of and demand for qualified team members. This is long-term thinking. By making time to plan strategically the benefits to you and your practice are huge: (1) You have a better view of the human resource needs for your practice. (2) Your HR costs are likely to be lower as you can anticipate demand for employees before they become expensive or unmanageable. (3) You will have more time to locate talent. Because you are anticipating your needs you avoid the crisis of finding a warm body immediately. (4) You will have more opportunities to select from a wider range of candidates as your applicant population will be larger.

Part of the strategic recruiting process is the image you create. What image do you present to your community? Are you an “employer of choice”? Are you viewed by both employees and outsiders in such a way that people want to work on your team? Are you viewed as a positive or a negative employer to others? What is your recruiting image? Are you seen as an employer with jobs available for qualified candidates? Are you continually looking for talent, regardless of your staffing needs? And, are you looking in all places?

Once you have addressed these issues, you may ask, “Where do I go to find these people?” You have many options, some more attractive to others depending on where you practice, the geographic market and the KSA’s (Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities) you need. Consider utilizing several of the strategies below.

Since recruiting can be a time-consuming process, some doctors outsource their selection process. They will use search firms and employment agencies to recruit their candidates. Another type of outsourcing is employee leasing and this approach has been growing rapidly in recent years. With employee leasing, the employer signs an agreement with a Professional Employer Organization (PEO), after which the existing employees are hired by the leasing firms and leased back to the practice. For a fee, you turn the team over to the leasing company which then writes the paychecks, pays the taxes, prepares and implements HR policies, and keeps all the required records. One of the advantages for the employees is that they often time receive a wider range of and possible higher quality benefits than they otherwise would get in many dental practices. This service is not inexpensive as leasing companies frequently assess a fee of four to six percent of employees' monthly salaries. For some dentists, eliminating this hassle is worth the fee.

What other strategic recruiting techniques are available to the dentist CEO? Employment advertising, recruiting diverse workers, current employee referrals, re-recruiting former employees and applicants, e-recruiting, school recruiting and devising creative methods are all strategies the dentist has available.

**Employment Advertising:** It is important to develop newspapers ads that convey critical information about the practice and position. Explain in the ad what the position demands that the prospect "DO" not ask them to list what they "HAVE." That they have 12 years of experience does not tell you anything about what they can do in making your patients feel valued, appreciated and comfortable. Your newspaper ad is only the beginning to a careful hiring process, but it is critical. A poorly produced ad could either attract too many of the wrong type of candidate or no candidates at all. In addition, daily newspapers are offering valuable, online content to both job seekers and employers. Now, you can use your local newspaper and the Internet technology you're familiar with to find a new career or an employee, quickly and easily. Newspaper Web sites can combine the best of traditional brick and mortar offerings with the latest technology.

**Recruiting Older Employees:** Consider recruiting senior and experienced individuals who have midlife career changes (*many people are leaving secure jobs to try new fields*), displaced older workers (*many experienced workers have been down-sized or displaced due to plant closings*), or retirees who have taken early retirement buyouts or formally retired from prior jobs. This group of people often demonstrates a commitment to service, strong work ethics and positive life balance.

**Disabled Workers:** This group of potential employees represents more than forty million individuals. While many jobs in the dental office doesn't lend itself to a disabled worker, some jobs can be accommodated inexpensively to people with disabilities. A wheel-chair bound person could very easily be accommodated at the front desk. In many cases changes in job duties, work stations and equipment may result in a job that a person with a disability can do and do it with excellence.

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**Employee-Focused Recruiting:** A strong source of potential employees is recommendations from current and former employees. Because most employees generally will not refer people who are unqualified they often provide high-potential candidates for consideration. This can include acquaintances, friends, and family members of employees. Many qualified people can be reached at a low cost. There are studies that have found that new employees recruited through current employee referrals have longer tenure with an organization than those from other recruiting sources. Some dentists offer financial rewards and incentives to any current employee who directly refers a prospect that gets hired.

**Re-Recruiting Former Employees and Applicants:** This approach can save a lot of time as something is already known about the prospects. These individuals previously had been successfully recruited and former employees can be thought of as an internal source in that they have ties with the dentist. Unless the separation was less than amicable and presuming their performance and capabilities are solid, former employees may be willing to come back because the other job and employer turned out to be less attractive than initially thought. This can become a quick and inexpensive way to fill an unexpected opening in your office.

**Internet Recruiting:** The job crunch appears to be contributing to the Internet gaining prominence as a recruiting resource for employers and a source of job information for candidates. Typically, the job search sites have one section for employers to list job openings and another section for job candidates to register, survey job listings, and to post resumes. Generally, the job search sites group or categorize jobs into career or occupational fields and permit a search by occupation and geographic area. Likewise, registered employers may place job listings and search employee resume files seeking specific skills. Some of the career sites on the web are focused towards a particular industry or job group. Generally, the job sites charge the employer to place a job ad. Pricing varies with the number and frequency of employer placed job ads. So where is an employer to begin? Human resources experts remind employers that the Internet is not a cure-all for solving all your staffing problems. With all this hype, remember that not all families have a computer at home. The benefit of Internet is that anyone can use it...and the bad news about the Internet is that anyone can apply. Having said all of the above, dentists have realized cost savings using Internet recruiting.

**School Recruiting:** High schools and/or vocational and technical schools may be a great source of prospective dental team members. Check with your schools to determine if they have a dental assistant or administrative assistant training program. Many dentists find remarkable employees right in their own back yard.

**Creative Recruiting:** The tight labor market crunch show no signs of letting up as dental offices continue to scramble to find qualified employees to meet staffing needs. Some dentists are offering signing bonuses up to \$1000. Others are advertising positions on local movie theatre screens as part of the pre-show entertainment. One

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doctor was planning to hold a raffle for his employees who refer potential candidates to her office, with weekend get-a-ways and full days at the spa as the prizes.

Many studies and surveys say that the number one issue facing business is finding and keeping good employees. This is true as well in dentistry. One of the greatest factors related to practice success over the next five to ten years will be how to find and retain employee talent. To promote a maximum response, recruiting efforts must be diversified. Local newspaper ads are still the primary job source for many job candidates. Also, promotion from within, employee referrals, help wanted signs, and contacts at local colleges or trade schools should all be part of your recruitment process. Remember: use traditional as well as Internet sources and be creative so that your message will stand out from the competition.

Regardless of the size of the dental practice, the doctor is a human resource manager. When the dentist devotes time to HR planning by implementing a strategic recruiting process, he/she will attract better qualified applicants for open positions and you will retain employees longer while elevating practice and personal profitability.

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Dr. Arndt is a certified professional dental Coach. He blends 20 years of clinical dental practice with five years of executive corporate experience in the financial planning and investment management industry. With his graduate business training and hands-on experience, he coaches dental professionals throughout the United States and Canada. Dr. Ron is the author of a series of **ThinBooks**® and web-based **Right Hiring and Retention for the Dental Team**® learning modules. Dr. Ron can be contacted at:

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