



Implant Game Changers

A Whitepaper Series By Roger P. Levin, DDS

Implant Game Changers is a monthly whitepaper on an important implant practice management topic. It provides you with a quick and easy way to understand a specific business challenge and how to translate the solution into higher production and profit, greater efficiency, more implant patients, lower stress and greater personal satisfaction.

Strategies to Keep Your Team Longer

Specialty practices are facing a staffing crisis, and they are not alone. This is a pervasive problem affecting many industries. The problem is that staffing challenges are now directly affecting practice production and the ability of specialty practices to manage patient flow, volume, and case completion.

Leadership has always been one of those softer subjects because it is hard to give it a mathematical formula and apply it on a day-to-day basis. However, in the face of the staffing crisis, leadership must be elevated to a much higher level of priority for every specialist because continuing turnover can cause between \$50,000 and \$100,000 in loss production per turnover.

The specialty team member of today

What do specialty team members want today? Is it different than before the pandemic? Is it different than 50 years ago? Today's specialty team member wants something different, but let's start by looking at what was happening in specialty practices 50 years ago.

Fifty years ago, the specialty team was extremely stable. People were much more likely to take jobs, stay in those jobs, show up for work every day, and perform at the desirable level. People had a greater work ethic and sense of basic manners, which translated into basic customer service. Furthermore, there was virtually no competition between practices and many candidates for each job when hiring.

Prior to the pandemic of 2020, there was already the beginnings of a staffing challenge. The level of commitment to staying in the job long-term was lower, manners and customer service sometimes had to be taught, and there were fewer candidates (especially trained candidates) for specialty staff positions. Still, practices were able to fill positions, and the average length of tenure of a staff member was far longer than we see today.

Fast forward to today. During the pandemic we saw many staff members simply quitting their jobs. This continues and has become so pervasive that business publications now refer to it as "The Great Resignation." At the time of drafting this white paper, The Great Resignation is continuing full steam. People will quit jobs without having another job, nobody is really checking references, and some people just decide to take time off for any reason if they are less than happy. This is all compounded by the fact that we have a shortage of candidates applying for jobs. Practices can go weeks or months before identifying a candidate. One of the number one complaints of CEOs in the business world today is that they are being forced to hire people who are far less qualified for the jobs. Compromise is the philosophy of the day, and a practice unwilling to compromise may be short staffed for extended periods.

So, what does today's specialty team member really want? It is different from the past. Here are some of the characteristics that we are seeing the team members want in specialty practices and it is notable that they are not much different from what employees want in all businesses.

1. Purpose. We have heard a lot about mission and purpose since the 1980s. Unfortunately, the concept of mission or purpose was one of those critical concepts that merely received a lot of lip service. Many specialty practices took the time to write mission statements because it was talked about by management speakers, but that was about as far as it went.

Today, defining your mission and purpose is critical. A brilliant statement by a business school professor was that “People no longer want a job. They want a purpose.” Keep this thought front and center. People no longer simply want to work for a paycheck. They want to feel that they are valued, contributing, and making a difference.

2. The end of transactional employment. Until the pandemic, most specialty staff employment was transactional. This means that it revolved around the simple concept of “We pay you, you do work.” They may have been treated well, attended an annual party, and even received a bonus, but the overall relationship was still transactional. Specialists talk about their staff members being like family, but how many staff members have you maintained close relations with that have left your practice prior to retirement?

The innovative approach to keeping your team longer is to move from transactional employment to “relationship employment.” Staff members want to go to work where they can build great relationships with both the specialist and other team members. They want to feel like they are going to work with a group of friends and that work is an extension of their personal life in terms of relationships. Specialists as leaders will now need to spend time building relationships that create higher levels of job satisfaction and a desire to continue working in the practice long-term. Failure to do so will simply accelerate the rate of turnover.

You may think that you have great relationships with your teams, but getting along is different from having a deep relationship. With deep relationships, people want to be in the practice, work with the specialist as a leader, and feel good about the overall environment. On Sunday night they are not saying “Oh God, tomorrow will be miserable.” Instead, they are saying “I had a great weekend and I loved it, but I also look forward to going to work tomorrow to be with my coworkers and the specialist.”

3. Compensation. The bottom line is simple. All practices are going to have to increase compensation to keep team members. Now let’s break this down a little bit more. Are people just greedy and ready to quit for a slight

increase at another office? We’ve found that this is often not the case. Most employees will stay in that practice if they have a purpose, enjoy coming to work and feel that they are compensated fairly. The definition of fairly is changing and every team member can access information about compensation levels by going on any of the online recruiting sites. There are no more secrets in specialty staff compensation just as there are no more secrets about how much you should pay to buy a new car.

Although most team members aren’t seeking to leave just to raise their compensation a bit, there is a gap between what they are being paid and the general market that will cause them to leave if it becomes too large. This gap is different in different areas; however, Levin Group estimates that the average level of staff compensation will rise by as much as 10% or more.

Keep in mind that compensation alone will not retain your team longer. It is compensation combined with having a purpose and building deep relationships.

Leadership will be the key to keeping the team longer

To increase team longevity, the specialist must master certain key leadership characteristics, traits, and behaviors.

First, be the example. If you want a positive team, be positive. If you want a happy team, be happy. If you want a fun team, be fun. If you want an energized team, display energy.

Second, build deep relationships with your team. The single best way to do that is having informal conversations. Set up a soft schedule where you meet with team members every 6 to 8 weeks for 10 or 15 minutes just to talk about how they are doing and what ideas or recommendations they may have. Spending time talking to team members one-on-one can build deep relationships. Pretending that saying hello in the morning and asking how you’re doing will build a deep relationship will not.

Third, create fun opportunities for people to spend time together. This could include bringing lunch into the office, going out to dinner, participating in a community group activity, or hosting a fundraising activity. One office that we know of celebrates every birthday by bringing in a gourmet lunch. Another has a weekly meal delivered by a local restaurant.

Fourth, develop true transparency. Let the team know what's going on in the office and include them in the practice vision. Transparency is the ability to communicate what you're thinking, what is happening, and what you are doing calmly, positively, and with reinforcement. Most specialists think they do this, but it can go a lot further and it will help to keep the team a lot longer.

Summary

The staffing crisis has not been a gradual and subtle shift. It has been a tsunami, and it is not going to be fixed anytime soon. A slower economy may encourage people to keep jobs longer. However, in specialty practices there is a shortage of trained people, and they can move to another practice very quickly. If you want to keep your team longer, many things will have to change. The key is to create an environment where they have no desire to move to another office because they genuinely enjoy the office they're in, like coming to work, and feel good about themselves. When you can build this type of environment through shifting your understanding of what team members really want today and displaying the right leadership traits, you will keep your team longer.

ROGER P. LEVIN, DDS

Roger P. Levin, DDS is the CEO and Founder of Levin Group, a leading practice management consulting firm that has worked with over 30,000 practices to increase production. A recognized expert on dental practice management and marketing, he has written 67 books and over 4,000 articles and regularly presents seminars in the U.S. and around the world.

To contact Dr. Levin or to join the 40,000 dental professionals who receive his *Practice Production Tip of the Day*, visit www.levingroup.com or email rlevin@levingroup.com.