



# Special Office Manager Section

This year, *DE* will bring you articles for sharing with your office manager. Look for this special section quarterly, with articles authored by top practice consultants and office managers.

## Three ways to create team unity

Karah Garrison

**YOUR TEAM WILL SPEND** more waking hours together than they will with family. In the practice where I work, our team is a cohesive unit. We truly like working together each and every day. Here are a few ways we do it:

**Morning huddles**—These give everyone the opportunity to communicate not only what’s happening that day but where they are personally. If someone is going through a difficult life situation, the team knows and is able to support that person—personally and professionally.

**Fear-free feedback philosophy**—We use learned communication skills

that enable us to provide each other with ideas on how to improve—without creating tension or hurt feelings.

**Continuing education**—This is a focus of the practice. Our doctors invest in the entire team, helping each of us grow and enhance our skills. Why? Because the better we are, the better care we can deliver to our patients. **DE**



**KARAH GARRISON** has been providing care coordination for Seal Beach Dentistry for 15 years. She enjoys making patients feel at home when they step into the office, and loves that the practice focuses on oral and systemic

health. When not providing continuing care for patients, she enjoys crafting, camping, and spending time with her husband and three children.

# Rock your role as an office manager

Laura Hatch, MS, FAADOM

**CONGRATULATIONS!** You have what could be one of the most important—and sometimes stressful—jobs in dentistry. And you probably love it, because you know you can make a difference in a patient's life. In the middle of a busy day, I encourage you to take a moment to give yourself a pat on the back and keep moving forward because you are a rock star office manager. I'd like to share four things that can help you keep rockin' each and every day.

## REMEMBER YOUR WHY

Remember your first day at the dental office? I bet you were so excited about your new job or position. You walked in the practice with pep in your step. Your vision was simple: to be the best office manager possible and change the world, one patient at a time. To achieve this vision and sustain your enthusiasm each and every day, you have to remember your why. It is the purpose behind everything that you do—to help patients enjoy a healthier life through optimal dental care. As we get busy, our why becomes more task-oriented. It becomes more about collections, overhead, and production. But you and I both know that none of those are your true why; they are merely line items on your to-do list.

## CHOOSE TO BE OPTIMISTIC AND GET CONNECTED

Choosing optimism makes your day better and is highly contagious. The reality is that things will never go exactly as planned. And when they don't, you can choose how you react. If you decide to take a "challenge" (not a "problem") and put a positive spin on it, it gives you a better outlook to try to solve the challenge. It also helps the team want to follow you to find that solution. Remember: people like to follow positive people.

Another way to be optimistic and positive is to get connected to others who inspire you, face the same challenges, and look for the same opportunities. First, build and foster a connection between

you and your doctor. You are on the journey together and share the same goals, objectives, and patient care philosophy. Second, get connected with other office managers via social media groups, online platforms like AADOM, and Front Office Rocks. Technology gives you so many ways to get connected with others who do what you do and can support you.

## LIVE AND LEARN

Continually invest in *you* by getting the insights and skills you need to grow personally and professionally. You did not have the opportunity to graduate from Office Manager University (or any other imaginary institution). Your role has great responsibility and comes with little formal training. Again, technology can get you connected to resources that can help you do more and stress less. Take time to find what training is available online. Learn how to leverage all the features of your practice management software. Listen to peers. Listen to experts. Then, implement the ideas that will rock your world, your team, your patients, and your practice. Be the rock star you were always meant to be. **DE**



**LAURA HATCH, MS, FAADOM**, has committed years of study to learn how to manage and empower team members. She partnered with her husband to build and manage two fee-for-service

dental practices. Hatch is the founder of Front Office Rocks, which offers web-based, on-demand front office training for dental practices. She also helps dental professionals through online video courses, live seminars, and coaching.



# Help patients talk about what they don't want to talk about

Cathy Jameson, PhD

**OVERCOMING THE DREADED RESPONSE** of "I'll think about it" in case presentation is a skill that most dentists and teams wish they possessed. The good news is that they can—with the right communication skills. The first step is gaining an understanding of what is getting in the way of a person saying yes to treatment.

People are more likely to buy what they want rather than what you tell them they need. One of the biggest unspoken barriers to care is patients' lack of understanding of how recommended care can help them achieve their own goals for their oral and overall health. Asking questions and listening for patients' personal motivators (i.e., what they want) will enable you to link recommended care back to what patients value.

If you've linked recommended dentistry back to patients' personal motivators and still hear them say, "I'll think about it," there are unspoken barriers to care. The only true way to uncover unspoken barriers is to ask questions and be willing to hear what your patients are trying to tell you.

Instead of accepting your patients' responses without seeking to understand their perspectives, you can ask questions that will provide insight into why they are not ready to commit to care. Let's look at some examples.

## 'I NEED TIME TO THINK IT OVER.'

Let's say you present treatment and the patient responds with, "I need time to think it over."

**Instead of saying:** "Mrs. Jones, I appreciate that you need some time to consider what we have discussed today. If I don't hear from you in the next couple of weeks, I'll give you a call."

**Say this:** "Mrs. Jones, I appreciate that you need some time to consider what we have discussed today. Tell me, is there something that



we may not have covered appropriately that has you uncertain about the care?"

**Or this:** "Mrs. Jones, we've discussed your care and we both agree that this is the type of treatment you'd like to receive. I know you want to go home and think about it. Can you share with me what would prevent you from moving forward with the dentistry you need?"

Sometimes patients are psychologically not ready to commit to care or cost. They truly want to go home and think about it. Or perhaps they wish to discuss their care with family and friends. The goal is to continue the conversation—but when, how, and where the patient prefers.

## 'I NEED TO TALK IT OVER WITH MY PARTNER.'

Patients often wish to talk things over with trusted confidants. Here's what to do when you receive this kind of response.

**Instead of saying:** "Mrs. Jones, I appreciate you need to talk this over with your husband. Just give us a call and let us know if you want to move forward with any of the treatment or payment options we've discussed."

**Say this:** "Mrs. Jones, I understand you would like to talk this over with your husband. I've put together this folder of photographs with the area(s) of concern and a description of the care we are recommending for you to share with him. We'd like permission to call you on Wednesday to see if you have any additional questions or concerns. Is morning or afternoon better for you?"

These examples illustrate a better approach to patient conversations that can help increase case acceptance and help patients get the care they need. Use these examples as starting points for rethinking how you and your team can have successful patient conversations. **DE**



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dental meetings and associations worldwide and has written top-selling books for dentistry. Her wealth of experience in practice management has helped many practices increase their productivity and profitability.



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# Help patients take full advantage of their benefits

Teresa Duncan, MS

**IT'S BECOMING MORE CHALLENGING** for dental insurance coordinators, office managers, and financial coordinators to keep up with the changing insurance benefit landscape. It's equally challenging to patients, especially when so much information must be communicated to patients within a small amount of time. Here are a few ways to have more successful insurance and financial conversations so more patients schedule and complete care.

## BE PREPARED

Patients expect the practice to be familiar with and understand their dental benefits. When a patient calls the office, they have made the decision to move forward with scheduling. Being willing and able to help them with their benefits gives them just another reason to choose your practice as their dental home. It's still smart to set expectations with patients: you may not know all the details of their insurance, but you will find out.

## KEEP IT SIMPLE

Insurance language can be confusing. To help patients understand, use language that is more descriptive and positive rather than language that revolves around contract clauses and limitations. For example, when we use the word "maximum," patients may get the impression that what is covered by the maximum is the level of care the patient can or should get. Instead, help patients understand that dental insurance is not designed to cover all the costs of dentistry.

If there's an out-of-pocket investment,

share the option of promotional financing, such as with a CareCredit health-care credit card, to help make it more affordable.

Patients will always be concerned and have questions about cost. By assuming the patient will have questions, we can prepare for those conversations. To be effective, we must serve patients clinically and financially. When we provide financial solutions, including helping them understand and optimize their benefits, we reinforce our roles as patient advocates. **DE**



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