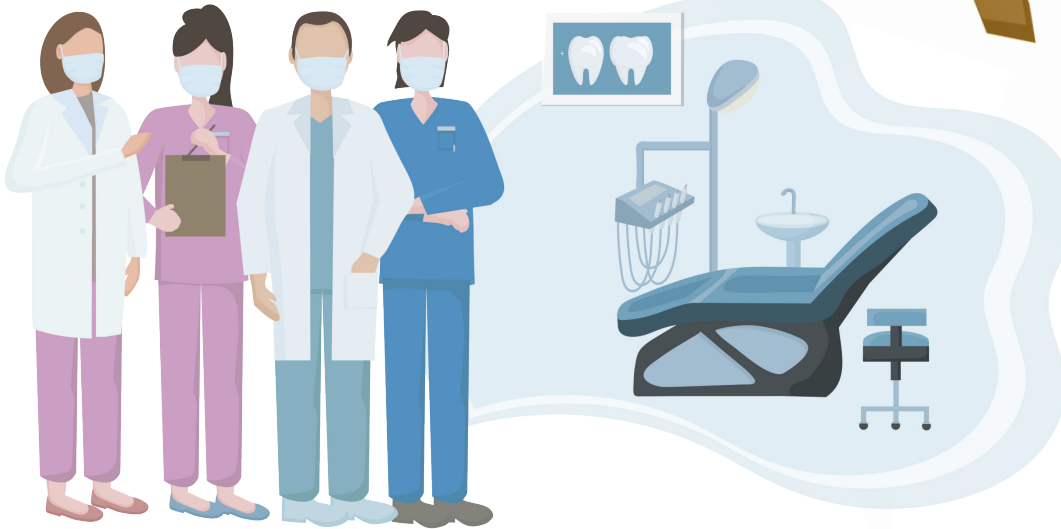


## The Most Valuable Dental Practice Culture; if you got it - you nailed it!



Anybody with a modicum of exposure to the dental business will be abundantly aware that the lack of good employees across all positions is a plague on many offices. The situation is exacerbated by a workforce having the benefit of governmental supports in the wake of a pandemic, but to be clear, this issue was bubbling under the surface long before we found ourselves in a pandemic. Outside of internal office dynamics, all my clients, many of whom are exceptional leaders and business people, bemoan the difficulty involved in attracting and retaining good staff.

***A dire prediction; Dentists of Canada – get ready to work alone (2-handed) like generations of dentists before you once did.***

Some have fared better than others, but having appraised hundreds of dental offices this past year alone, we see this issue as being endemic with only one solution – culture! Culture cannot be manufactured, bought or forced by leaders. It's organic and it's priceless.

Culture is real and the people that foster amazing cultures are the real deal. It is being in the trenches everyday with your staff and getting the results out of the hardship. Culture is celebrating this hard won success, and before I run out of tired clichés, it is something that is earned every day. As soon as the culture at your practice is neglected, bad habits start to creep in. It is no coincidence that the best run, most coveted and thus bestselling practices are owner-operated and usually involve a figurehead owner that leads by example.

This dovetails nicely into the inherent lack of culture that many practices suffer. For better or worse, and we at ROI Corporation don't claim to be totally innocent in this dynamic, dentistry leans heavily into a profit-driven model that strips back all operational aspects and prioritizes shareholder value or the bottom line. There are many small/medium/large accumulators and DSO models out there that have a ferocious need to service debt and maximize profit, but don't have enough skin-in-the-game, or leadership capabilities that compare to the aforementioned owner-operated dental practice. To create an amazing culture and patient experience, a level of obsession is required that a salaried individual is not often willing to deliver.



The most recent phenomenon to intensify this problem is the “finder’s/referral fee” paid to agencies, dental reps and staff at other offices to find somebody in the area who is not happy in their place of employment. Your staff are ‘socially’ connected at many levels – and you are oblivious. Your competitors are offering financial incentives if their staff is effective in persuading someone to resign from your office and play for the other team. Think Jerry McGuire for those of you who remember **“Show me the Money!”**

I have it on good authority that one staff member at a client’s practice was coaxed over to an immediate competitor’s office and the new hire and their referee were paid a handsome fee of \$2000 each for their “loyalty”. My client, the victim of this raid, never got the opportunity to make a counter offer. This longtime employee won’t even answer their calls.

Lest anybody out there be under any illusion, your staff are being coveted, and those with a necessity to profit will do whatever is necessary to make it happen. Corporate dentistry will tell you they have a great culture. Some people who have worked there, and, more importantly some of the dentists who sold to them, tell me something very different. They will never say anything publicly; they do not want the hassle, but they are not happy and if the dentists who sold to these organizations are unhappy, you can be sure the staff involved are equally unhappy.

**It does not need to be this way. Corporations serve a purpose and when their leaders focus on Human Resources first, and growth and profit second, it can be a wonderful environment.**

Not exclusively reserved for corporate or big city practices, no one is exempt from this phenomenon and I do not predict that it will end anytime soon. Raiding and pillaging your competitors when you work in small communities is the beginning of the end of your reputation within the profession. The dental community might hear a little bit about this, but most patients will be oblivious. It’s important to consider how the other dentists in the community will perceive dentists that pay cash to recruit staff from other practices. I want to go on the record as saying this is not a practice that we endorse, and we identify this trend as being inherently negative for the profession. Perhaps we need to look at better pay, training, and again, the culture within our practices. We all know that good employees are priceless.

Corporate headhunters have been doing this for decades. My firm has never hired a corporate headhunter. We are fortunate that our reputation has preceded itself and that people approach us when seeking employment, not the other way around. I am grateful that our culture is so strong that people naturally and organically are attracted to work for ROI Corporation. It has not always been that way and it took years to build a strong culture.

One final trend to mention; Temp Agencies pay much more than you do! Temps can come and go as they please and make more with less commitment. Temps control their days and hours. It’s like dating; nothing serious, just a few casual assignments with benefits! This generation likes that idea more than job security and a long-term commitment to just one practice.

Practice owners; have you built a dynamic and gratifying culture in your practice? If so, you are a very successful and inspirational leader. Your office is not only more valuable and more saleable than others, it also has a “social media” footprint and a group of staff that believe in the same end goal as you. This absolutely matters in today’s market. When a practice goes for sale your practice culture and reputation will proceed you.

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