

□ THE RECRUITER (AKA THE 'POACHER')



Be warned: The headhunters never rest.

They are prowling dental social media to contact and recruit your staff.

They have a mandate: offer attractive incentives to lure team members to another practice.

A VIP client of mine recently shared that three of his staff members sat him down and issued an ultimatum.

They had been solicited by a headhunter who offered higher wages and generous 4-figure signing bonuses.

When he asked for proof, they refused to provide any.

They looked him straight in the eye and said, "It's true. You have a week to decide, Doc."

It felt like a *Mutiny on the Bounty* to him. He lost sleep and was noticeably upset when he called me.

After all the years of loyalty (which goes both ways) this is what it came down to.

Money.

So, he swallowed his pride and increased their wages.

Was the threat of mass resignations real? He will never know for sure.

The headhunters exist and they will be in business for the foreseeable future.

They may already be talking to your staff!

But for whom are they working? Who can afford to pay these generous signing bonuses?



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Your direct competitor is the answer. And of course, the service organizations bugger (aka the SOBs).

In my view, it's not cool to solicit thy neighbours' staff.

The offices near to you may or may not be owned by an accumulator. Rarely do they individually brand their front doors (at least until recently) thus, staff may not realize they are being recruited into a conglomerate-run factory-style setting.

All dental offices experience turnover, and multi-location owners must constantly fill vacancies to keep shareholders happy.

I was recently informed of a firm recruiting dentists (as associates) for a rural Canadian practice. The recruiter's fee was \$30,000, payable only if they successfully placed an associate.

I surmise the recruitment fee is lower for the other dental auxiliaries, but nonetheless, the headhunters are getting paid big bucks - and your staff are being offered a sweet signing bonus to leave you.

How can you defend your practice against aggressive, cash-in-hand recruiters?

- ✓ **Be generous – pay more.**
- ✓ **Be the best boss you can be – bring your A-Game every day!**
- ✓ **Polish up your leadership acumen – listen to what your staff complain about, and truly listen to them!**
- ✓ **Alter working hours to suit their needs, not just yours.**
- ✓ **Upgrade the office interior to make a pleasant environment – toilets and the staff room matter!**

People stay where they like to work. They seek a great culture. One that is fun, as stress-free as possible (given how demanding dentistry can be), and of course, where the compensation is fair. They also know what others are being paid elsewhere.

Trust me – they know.

Most surveys indicate that money is not the number one factor in job satisfaction, but I would argue it's easily in the top three.

So, if you must give a raise under the threat (real or fake) of resignation, just do it.

Turnover is extremely expensive. Just ask the service organizations!

Higher wages sometimes equate to greater job satisfaction –and your patients should notice that.

I have always strongly recommended that bonuses should be completely random and entirely immeasurable. Do not tie them to financial metrics, otherwise, you are doing mathematical gymnastics your staff can track. They might even figure out ways to manipulate the numbers to maximize those metrics and earn bonuses.

The random part? Do it when it feels right. You and your team both know when the office is doing well.

There is no better time to give a nice little recognition bonus than when it is unexpected.



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It is like getting flowers when you least expect them. They're the best kind.

Retention bonuses can be structured and paid in dozens of diverse ways.

[\[Click here for my article on 23 tips for retaining great staff.\]](#)

Sorry to be a downer – but be aware that the poachers are circling. They are grifting in the shadows, taking your staff to lunch, and you do not even know it.

Thousands of dental staff have been contacted. Offered a free lunch - probably right around the corner from your office – maybe even tomorrow?

Not all have taken the bait, because most genuinely like where they are. And change is not easy for most either.

“I like where I work and don't want to move just for a few dollars more” - a common answer to the poacher.

That's largely because most of you are good leaders who foster strong, positive cultures, something most often found firsthand in owner/operator solo dental practices.

The independently owned practices avoid the bureaucracy and high employee turnover rates seen in larger service organizations.

But it is a great deal of work for you – the owner.

Suck it up. It's one of the burdens of being an entrepreneur!

If you don't like the HR challenges, sell your practice and work for the buyer. Let them manage it.

Don't just take my word for it about big companies; call up one of your colleagues. Everyone knows at least one dentist working in a large service organization. If they trust you, they will be honest with you.

It is so different when you go from solo practice, being a firsthand dentist and owner-operator (the chief cook and bottle washer) to becoming a small cog in a big, slow-moving wheel.

I can tell you that I hear some absurd HR stories and a few brutal criticisms.

Keep them coming, folks. Those who do confide in me know that I never drop names – it's how I protect them!

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