

BACKGROUND

Ideally all employers would regularly conduct employee evaluations that included the opportunity for a pay raise. In the real world, some practices don't have any annual reviews and the staff members are forced to initiate all conversations regarding an increase in pay. These situations tend to create feelings of being devalued, underappreciated, and underpaid among the staff, which can lead to a lack of motivation and result in poor quality patient care. Annual evaluations and pay increases aren't mandated for private employers under the Fair Labor Standards Act, so employees need to know how to present the case for pay increases to their employer. Some tips on what to do and what not to do were offered.

WHAT EMPLOYEES NEED TO DO

When an employee determines that he or she deserves a reward, the first question that he or she must answer is why. The why needs to be related to how that employee contributes to the success of the practice and needs to be grounded in facts that support the answer. Just as a lawyer prepares an argument for his or her client, the dental employee needs to put together a coherent and well-supported case for getting a bump in salary.

Timing

One of the first things to consider is the timing of the request. The employee should request a meeting with the employer, considering when that person is at his or her best and when it's possible to have a conversation without interruptions.

Timing also refers to the state of the practice. If the practice just invested in some new and expensive technology or had to pay for a costly repair, it's best to wait until that has become less of an issue. If the practice is declining or plateaued, the timing could be better. However, the employee can take these situations and use them to lay a foundation for his or her salary request by being proactive, suggesting ideas to help the practice grow, or asking what he or she can do to help.

Working the Numbers

Whatever the employee can do to create value in appointments should be done. This includes having hygienists help patients understand the importance of their hygiene visits, which will create more commitment on their part to keep their appointments and accept treatment. This makes the employee more valuable to the practice. A way hygienists can contribute is to guide patients toward any needed restorative treatment. Then, when asking for a raise, the hygienist should give examples about how he or she has directly impacted the number of restorative procedures done. This can be done by manually tracking daily and by using a copy of the daily schedule.

Another number that needs to be addressed is the pay rate for persons in the employee's position for that geographic area. These rates should be competitive and based on experience, performance, and contributions. Some of this information is available online, and some may be gathered from conversations with colleagues or a professional association. Related to this is the concept of total compensation. If the employee receives benefits in addition to a salary, his or her hourly pay rate may be somewhat less than others who don't receive those benefits.

Employees should have an idea of their production numbers as well. Tracking production for 3 months or so will yield an approximation of one's production. Gross earnings should then be about a third of that number. Production can also be estimated by procedure. Dental hygienists should perform perio procedures about 30% of their working time. Even if the hygienist isn't at that 30% level, he or she can show that the number is increasing, which improves the contribution made.

Collections are also an important consideration. Actual collections can be less if more insurance companies have the practice in their network.

Finally, employees should be able to document their downtime percentage. Industry standards indicate that the ideal downtime is less than 5% of the time available for patients. What is being done on that downtime can also be important. Examples showing commitment, teamwork, quality care, and patient satisfaction being delivered can impress the employer.

Have a Plan When the Answer is No or Not Now

Employees shouldn't just leave when they're turned down for an increase. Instead they can ask what to do to be considered in the future and set specific measurable goals together with the dentist, as well as a time for re-evaluation.

If the employee is already at the top of the pay range for the office, other types of compensation can be suggested. These include reimbursement for continuing education courses, a lump sum bonus, a production-based bonus system, or an allowance for such things as uniforms. Any arrangement the dentist agrees to should be put in writing.

If the answer is no and the employee feels this is a sticking point, it may be time to consider other options. These can include looking around for another position, considering the value of what he or she already has, or deciding if a short drive to work is worth staying and being paid less.

Be Professional

Whenever the situation arises, the employee should maintain a professional, positive attitude. All facts should be carefully considered and ready to be presented in a concise manner. Even if the conversation doesn't go the employee's way, he or she should maintain a professional demeanor.

WHAT EMPLOYEES NEED TO AVOID

Just a few things need to be avoided when asking for a pay increase, as follows:

- Don't ask based on the length of service.
- Don't use information about what other staff members are making.
- Don't bring personal financial issues into the conversation.
- Don't threaten or state ultimatums.

DISCUSSION

Having to ask for a raise is a difficult situation and the conversations involved can be uncomfortable. Employees need to be

confident in their abilities and present a strong case based on their contributions to the success of the dental practice. Before leaving a practice, employees should give the employer the chance to reevaluate what they are being paid and consider the value of keeping the employee.

Clinical Significance

Periodic conversations should be held in all dental practices regarding performance and salary issues. When an employee does well, a reward is in order. Expectations can be discussed at these interactions, which can have benefits for both the employee and the employer.

Whiteley J: Dos and don'ts when asking for a raise. *RDH Mag* 39:24, 26, 28, 30, 2019

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