

- If the contract is set for a fixed amount of years, the employer cannot terminate the employee except for cause. Normally this category is used for dentists who have special skills that would be highly desired by other practices.

### Compensation

Prospective dental associates should research what constitutes a reasonable salary because this factor is the most influential when deciding to take a position. Salary is also a significant source of disputes in the future. The best approach is to have a contract that sets out clear provisions accompanied by a detailed, clear discussion to ensure that all parties understand the provisions. Compensation is based on business custom, so there is room to discuss trade-offs, such as modifications of duties or paid continuing education days. Employees will want to be paid for everything they produce up to the final day of their employment as well as a provision for collecting their percentage after leaving the practice.

### Clinical Significance

It's important for potential associates to recognize the limitations to their knowledge with respect to signing employment contracts. It's often wise for these new employees to consult an attorney who can identify any conditions or terms that are problematic. The attorney may also guide the prospective employee to ask appropriate questions. As a result, the prospective employee can look forward to a more comfortable, confident working relationship with his or her new employer.

Gilman S: Contractual obligations. *Dentaltown*, Jan 2019, pp 74-77

Reprints not available

## EQ

### Improving emotional intelligence



#### BACKGROUND

Today's focus in personal development is on being mindful, fully aware, and present in our own lives. It can be challenging to focus on this when we are bombarded by problems or simply stressed over the little things that seem to never get enough of our attention. Dental practitioners have stress, part of which is caused by a consuming need to provide the perfect service in the perfect practice. The dual role of dentist and practice owner is full of these types of challenges. It is suggested that strengthening our emotional intelligence skills, also termed *EQ*, will improve coping abilities and reduce stress. Situations can then be addressed more successfully.

#### SITUATIONS DENTIST/OWNERS FACE

##### Perfectionism

It's impossible to be perfect all the time, but dentists seem to expect every case, each root canal, and all procedures to always go smoothly. It's unrealistic to expect this level of practice—it simply won't happen. Berating oneself for being human and fallible is counterproductive. Instead, the dentist should pause at the end of a procedure, consider what could have been done differently, and then classify this as a lesson now learned. If he or she has clearly misjudged a situation, that same pause should be spent considering how to handle the situation in the future and thinking of ways to be more effective. Mistakes should be viewed as opportunities for learning.

##### Frustration with What You Can't Control

When things happen and there is nothing the dentist could have done to avoid them, it can be frustrating and can adversely affect the rest of his or her day. A better response is to simply accept that some things can't be controlled. It may be worthwhile to review the situation and see if any systems failed to work as expected, if there are weaknesses in the training of staff, or if other possible contributing factors were the problem. The important thing is to be OK with things that can't be controlled.

##### Staff Communication and Expectations

What should the dentist do if it seems like the staff doesn't listen when he or she is speaking or doesn't seem motivated to come up with solutions to problems that arise? If the dentist is honest, he or she must recognize that staff members aren't infallible and maybe they need more training on how to process the dentist's directions. Dental providers are leaders who are often direct and even harsh when giving directions. Staff members listen to the dentist but may be distracted by the dentist's tone or body language and actually miss the verbal message.

To address this situation, dentists need to stop doing what they're doing, really listen to the individual, acknowledge their frustration, and, if needed, offer a solution. When staff members feel that the dentist has actually heard them, they can make a connection to the dentist and his or her management style and recognize that they're all on the same team. Changes will only

occur if the staff members believe that the dentist has heard them and understands and empathizes with them.

### Handling the Unexpected

Sometimes things occur that are beyond the dentist's or the staff's control. It's important to deal with the situation through empathetic listening. If the situation involves an unexpected need for additional treatment and the patient seems distraught, the source is likely the simple fact that it wasn't what the patient expected and he or she was unprepared. Through empathetic listening, the dentist can employ communication that reflects the emotional component of the situation back to the patient and then can offer a solution that will help to make the situation better.

This is a powerful EQ tool because it relies on a connection based on emotion, which creates openness to the advice that is then offered. Often individuals go straight to the solution, but it's important to acknowledge the emotional component. In addition to the dentist doing this, staff members should deliver the same message. This is the way to turn a difficult experience into an example of how the dental practice cares about the patient.

### Situations Where the Dentist Is Overwhelmed, Stressed, and Burned Out

A common complaint of dental practice owners is their struggle with separating home and business concerns. When a dentist's entire being is wrapped up in the practice, it's likely that he or she won't find happiness in either home or office. Although many factors contribute to this struggle, a few key components can be addressed to help overcome the problem.

To understand that the dental office is not the dentist's everything, he or she should focus on some *human* questions. These include asking the following: Who am I? What am I passionate about? What are my values and goals? What do I do outside of the office? Do I take part in any non-goal-oriented activities? How am I creative and caring? Becoming self-aware through the answers to these questions can help to reduce the cascade

of emotions that can create stress and burnout. The goal is to have the dentist diagnose himself or herself just as he or she would diagnose a patient in order to better understand episodes of anger or frustration. These episodes should be documented so their occurrence can be tracked, which will help provide clarity in understanding them.

Cultivating habits outside of dentistry can also ease the dentist's mind. It's important to engage in creative pursuits and to take time away from work for recreational activities. Creative problem solving during these activities can help with day-to-day problem solving activities. This will help to strengthen the dentist's EQ skills.

It's also important to focus on values and non-negotiable aspects of life. This includes family, friends, and relationships outside of the office. Having people in his or her life helps to support the dentist and even can lead to resetting his or her mindset when that is needed.

### Clinical Significance

Waiting until we reach the point where we feel overwhelmed, stressed out, and ready to quit is an extremely unproductive way to handle problems, even small ones. It's important to ensure that we are emotionally healthy as well as physically healthy to achieve our goals. The dentist's mind is the most valuable asset he or she has and its EQ strength is an important determinant of the greatness that can be achieved.

Angadi S: Improve your EQ. *Dentaltown*, Jan 2019, pp 92-96

Reprints not available

# FIRST VISIT

## Perfecting first patient interactions



### BACKGROUND

New patients are the lifeblood of a dental practice that wants to grow. The first appointment of a new patient is an opportunity to make a lasting impression, and the entire staff should be engaged to ensure that the marketing and referral efforts that went into attracting that patient won't go to waste.

### BEFORE THE VISIT

Once an individual has scheduled an appointment, a team member should call the day before the visit to help familiarize the individual with the practice and answer questions. This is a good time to ask about any special requests the patient may have. A positive end to these calls is an enthusiastic reminder that the