It’s an interesting paradox of these economic times. Although the unemployment rate nationwide remains high and it would seem that the job market would be flooded with able candidates, according to a recent Manpower survey, talent shortages remain a problem. In some cases, employers have become so rigid in what they will accept that some very good, albeit not perfect, candidates are never even considered.

The challenge is that the people available and the skills required by employers do not match up, particularly as businesses seek greater specificity in the skill set. In other words, there may be plenty of talent but it’s not the right talent available in the right place at the right time. For these employers, flexibility is an issue.

However, for dentists, the opposite is too often the case. Typically, dentists are so flexible in their hiring practices, they make JELL-O® look rigid. When a vacancy occurs in the practice, it is common for dentists to focus almost solely on filling the position and give little consideration to the long-term quality of the hire or the specificity of the skills required — particularly if the hire is going to be a business employee.

They may zero in on one line on the resume that indicates a sliver of past dental office experience and consider this applicant to be “the one.” Yet they will disregard a multitude of red flags, such as

Because these instruments come into contact with the mouth, it is no wonder they’re a breeding ground for bacteria,” said AGD spokesperson Cynthia Sherwood, DDS, FAGD. “As dentists, we see this same growth of bacteria in dentures, athletic mouthguards and toothbrushes.”

Researchers found that many of the bacteria can cause illness in humans and are highly resistant to the antibiotics normally prescribed by general practitioners. This finding makes sterilization of instruments extremely important.

“ Instruments should be cleaned after each use to reduce the number of organisms,” said Sherwood. “And cleaning should not be confined to the mouthpiece, since the bacteria invade the entire instrument.”

To avoid transmission of bacteria from instrument to player, parents and students should frequently wipe the surface of the instrument that comes into contact with the skin and mouth. The instrument should be taken apart for thorough cleanings on a regular basis.

Glass suggests using cleaning cloths and solutions made specifically for instruments. Most importantly, students are advised not to share their instruments with others. Students should consult with their band instructor for additional ways to disinfect their instruments.

More information about oral health is available on the AGD website for the public, located at www.knowyourteeth.com. The website is a source of consumer information on dental care and oral health. Its goal is to provide reliable information in a format that is easy to use and navigate, and to provide the tools that will help consumers of all ages to care for their teeth and other aspects of oral care.
gaps in the resume or frequent job changes. Dentists commonly ignore recommendations to check out references. Too often they are driven by one thought: “How quickly can I get someone, anyone, in here?”

Little or no consideration is given to assessing the likelihood that this person will succeed in the position or what impact the individual will have on the success of the practice over time, or in other words, the “quality of the hire.” That being said, hiring failures can cost a fortune.

The figure commonly tossed about to fill a vacancy is 1.5 times the position’s annual salary. Yet, if the new hire doesn’t work out and you’re filling the position again six or maybe nine months later, you’re looking at doubling the cost, not to mention the frustration.

Thus, it is all the more reason why placing greater attention on the quality of the hire rather than merely filling the slot is tremendously important.

Take steps now to ensure that when the next employee turns in his or her two-weeks’ notice, you’re not spiraling into panic mode and scrambling to merely fill the position. Establish a well-defined hiring procedure.

‘Mission minded’

Recruiting quality employees is a process that goes well beyond the two-line classified ad written in secret code. Look at your mission statement and remind yourself where you want to take your practice. Remember, you’re building a team, a practice and a vision — not just filling a position.

Consider the strengths and weaknesses of your practice as well as your own and those of your employees. Are there voids in employee skills and/or duplication of strengths or weaknesses among the team?

One of the key components of this hiring procedure is a clearly defined job description for every position in your practice. Keep in mind that when an opening occurs, that is the opportunity to closely look at the position and update and/or refine the job description to better address the continually changing needs of the office. A staff opening isn’t the time to be creating the job description from scratch.

In addition, please don’t utter this tired line: “But I don’t like job descriptions because they box people in.” If that’s your excuse for not having job descriptions, I can assure you that your practice also lacks accountability. There are likely significant system breakdowns, and you are losing money hand over fist.

What’s more, if you’re looking for quality applicants to fill the position, not just a warm body, they expect to see a job description. The applicants will want details of precisely what the job entails and the expectations. Vague generalizations about the position that appear in the classified ads will not satisfy a quality applicant.

Next, consider your advertising strategy. What type of applicant do you want to attract, then target your ad to appeal to that particular audience. Place your ad in publications and on websites where prospective candidates are likely to see it. Look well beyond the local paper; consider online newsletters geared toward business employees, management staff as well as the usual dental publications targeting assistants and dental hygienists. Additionally, some dentists have had very good luck using online job advertising services as well.

Screen the applications first by...
‘Gut instincts are no match for good data.
A computerized assessment can help you
weed through applicants within minutes
to find the best candidates for the position.’

narrowing down the list of can-
didates to those you are most
interested in. From there, conduct
phone interviews. Be sure that in
the phone interviews you ask all of
the applicants the same basic
questions. Pay attention to tone of
voice, word usage and grammar.
You should now be able to pare the
list down to only those you are most
interested in interviewing face to
face.

Skills, personality and more
While no applicant is perfect, it’s
important to understand each job
and what particular attributes a
prospective employee needs to
have. If your goal is a 98 percent
collection rate, you don’t want a
candidate who has trouble asking
for money — even if she does have
a perfect smile and charming per-
sonality.

Most importantly: gut instincts
are no match for good data. As the
school of hard knocks has taught
virtually every dentist I know, a
seemingly rock-solid resume and
practical skills offer no assurance
that the person you hire will prove
to be the excellent candidate you
interview.

The candidates may appear to
have the right skill set, but if one
has trouble making decisions or the
other is overly controlling, today’s
seemingly ideal hire can metamor-
phose into tomorrow’s employment
nightmare. Don’t gamble and don’t
guess, instead, test the candidates.

Beyond “You’re hired!”
Once the new hire is in the prac-
tice, help him or her succeed. Sup-
ply the necessary equipment, tools
and training needed to perform
the job well. Clearly explain what
is expected of the employee and
how his or her performance will be
measured. Provide an office policy
manual that explains policies and
procedures, such as sick time, holi-
days, vacation, disciplinary proce-
dures, etc.

In addition, provide routine,
going and direct feedback. This
constructive direction helps the
employee learn the ropes. Finally,
schedule performance reviews to
assess the new hire’s performance
at least twice, and preferably three
times, during the first 90 days.

If you take specific steps before,
during and after the hiring process,
you are far more likely to ensure
that quality hires make up your
quality team.

Testing tools available in the
dental marketplace provide a sta-
tistically valid and scientifically based
hiring assessment tool for dentists.
The computerized assessment
measures job applicants against a
profile of the “ideal” dental practice
employee for each position. The
procedure is simple.

Applicants answer a list of ques-
tions online. Just minutes later, the
dentist receives a statistically reli-
able report enabling him or her to
clearly determine if the candidate
under consideration would be a
good match for the position being
filled. It’s straightforward and accu-
rate.

What’s more, this carefully test-
ed and thoroughly researched hir-
ning tool is fully compliant with the
legal requirements associated with
employee testing.

About the author
Sally McKenzie is CEO of
McKenzie Management, which
provides success-proven man-
agement solutions to dental
practitioners nationwide. She
is also editor of The Dentist’s
Network Newsletter at www.the-
dentistsnetwork.net; the e-Man-
germent Newsletter from www.
mckenziemgmt.com; and The
New Dentist™ magazine, www.the
newdentist.net. She can be reached
at (877) 777-6151 or sallymck
@mckenziemgmt.com.