



# Overcoming Staffing Shortages

Implementing the Right Process,  
Technologies, and Solutions



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Founder

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# The Staffing Shortage by the Numbers



85% of practices achieve **schedule fullness**

November 2023

Source: [ADA Health Policy Institute](#)



27% reported vacant staff positions prevented appointment scheduling from reaching 100%

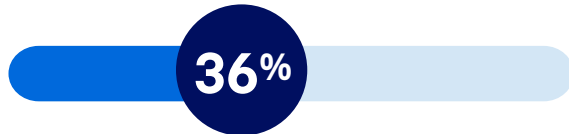
Source: [ADA Health Policy Institute](#)



**10 Months**

Wait for hygiene appointment at one Texas practice

Source: [Becker's Dental + DSO Review](#)



36% of dentists actively recruiting for dental assistants and/or hygienists

Source: [ADA Health Policy Institute](#)



90% dentists say recruiting hygienists is more challenging now than pre-pandemic

Source: [Journal of Dental Hygiene](#)

**36,000 DENTAL WORKERS**

Number of dental workers the U.S. could be short by 2032

Source: [Becker's Dental + DSO Review](#)



**Dental Industry PROJECTED GROWTH**



Source: [Fortune Business Insights](#)

## Expected to Retire by 2028



Source: [DrBicuspid.com](#)

# Staffing Shortage's Impact on Productivity, Passion, and Patient Experience

One of the dental industry's biggest challenges is finding and retaining talented individuals for all positions.

More than a third of dentists said they are actively recruiting for hygienists and/or dental assistants, according to the American Dental Association Health Policy Institute. And many practices are also short-staffed in other positions.

The work still has to get done, and that means the people who are left in your practice can feel like a hamster on a wheel, always running but never getting anywhere.

When people feel like they are cogs in a machine, it creates a poor culture, more burnout, increased turnover, and lower production.

The Mayo Clinic defines job burnout as a type of work-related stress that leads people to feel worn out physically or emotionally.

People who are burned out may experience:

- ✓ Self-doubt in their skills or abilities
- ✓ Lack of energy
- ✓ Difficulty focusing
- ✓ Trouble sleeping
- ✓ Less patience with colleagues & patients



Many employees feel **undervalued, overworked, and underpaid.**

*Ian Prendergast*



**1 in 10 dentists** experienced burnout in the U.S. (2023)

[Source: DrBicuspid](#)



**8 in 10 dentists** experienced burnout in the U.K. (2023)

[Source: Dentistry.co.uk](#)

# Finding Creative Solutions to the Staffing Challenges

During the pandemic, millions of people figured out how to do part or all of their jobs from home. But many roles in a dental practice don't have that luxury.

**Dental practices and dental support organizations (DSOs) are getting creative. Some of the options include:**

- ✓ Job-sharing
- ✓ Hiring temp and part-time hygienists and dental assistants
- ✓ Implementing technology to reduce manual tasks
- ✓ Remote work opportunities/outsourcing
- ✓ Creating their own dental assisting schools

Ian Prendergast is the co-founder and CEO of Toothio, which connects dental hygienists and assistants to dental offices on-demand.

"We're seeing a disturbing trend where in the next five years, it's expected that one in three dental hygienists will retire. So that tells me that staffing is not going to get any better anytime soon. **We need to get more efficient in how we operate our practices and get creative about how we're recruiting the staff to support the practices,**" Prendergast says.

The same is happening with other positions. That's created a very competitive marketplace for experienced employees.

"Frankly, a lot of people have said, I can get a job doing something else and get paid about the same amount," says Jill Nesbitt, the founder of Optimize Dental Consulting and an expert in technology implementation and training. "That's having a pretty significant impact on the bottom line for our practices."



Ensure your salaries are competitive by monitoring the wages being offered on job-seeker sites for both dental and non-dental positions, including store associates, clerical positions, and coffee shop baristas. It may be necessary to do an off-cycle salary adjustment to retain employees.

**7,500**

Hygienists left dentistry during the pandemic

[Source: Journal of Dental Hygiene](#)



**6% decrease**

in number of hygiene program graduates 2019 to 2022

According to an [October 2023 podcast](#) by the Association of Dental Support Organizations, some **dental assistants and front office team members are making anywhere from 10% to 30% more than they were pre-pandemic.**

If you are hiring full-time employees, prepare to pay more than you have in the past. Some practices are offering large sign-on bonuses, especially for hygienists. Other practices are offering a retention bonus in exchange for a one-year commitment.

*Online Ad November 2023*

**Dental Hygienist - Full Time - Brighton 10 K SIGNING BONUS !**

US-MA-Brighton 2 days ago

Some dental groups have created their own dental assisting schools to attract new people to the profession, and will pay them during the training process.

Other practices and groups are turning to resources like Toothio to solve the staffing crisis.

“We’re in the middle of an evolution in the labor force right now,” said Prendergast. “It’s happening across multiple verticals, not just dental. People are prioritizing a new way to work, a new work-life balance. They want to be able to make money, they want to be able to take vacations with their families, they want to be able to watch their kids, and still engage in the industry that they love.”

“What we’re seeing is that a lot of people prefer to temp now,” said Josey Sewell, founder of JoyFULL People.

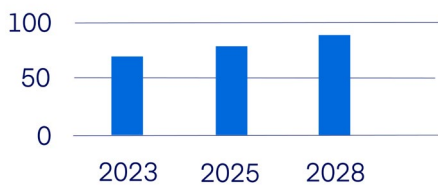
“Decades ago, it was about going to work, and putting your head down, and getting your paycheck. **Now, it’s so much about looking for a strong leader and a company that aligns with your personal values.** And if it doesn’t, they’re not going to work for you,” Sewell said.



Make training temps easy by having training videos and written standard operating procedures (SOPs) for basic tasks like logging in, taking images, charting notes, and scheduling future appointments.

Ramp up staffing when you have patient demand by using temps.

# of Freelancers in the U.S. (in millions)



■ # of Freelancers in the U.S.

Source: Forbes

**17%**  
Growth in gig economy year-over-year



# Leveraging Technology and Tools

**One easy way to help reduce the revolving door of employees is to ensure you're leveraging technology and tools already in your practice.**

Cloud-based systems enable teams in different locations to access patient files and information. This flexibility also provides substantial benefits to these dental groups to overcome staffing challenges. If you're short on doctors, hygienists or assistants and you need to cover hours in another location, it's easy to add that additional office to the user rights. There's another benefit: you don't have to worry about training the team member on a different software.

DSOs are finding that they can build remote teams or even outsource insurance claim

processing, financial reconciliation, marketing activities, et cetera, simply by providing a login to their cloud-based system, Jill Nesbitt said. Another substantial benefit of having a cloud-based system is that new features and add-ons are released regularly. The software updates can dramatically increase efficiency.

"Denticon in particular has a really strong functionality that can help streamline online scheduling, collections, insurance claim processing, and posting payments," Nesbitt said.



Start by doing a **workplace assessment** to see how teams are using the systems today. They may not even realize there are built-in tools that will **save them time and make them more efficient.**

Jill Nesbitt



# Developing More Efficient Systems: Where To Start

**Conduct a workflow assessment to document how you currently:**

- Allow patients to schedule appointments
- Collect patient information
- Enter data into the practice management system
- Verify insurance benefits
- Welcome patients into the practice
- Perform the patient exam
- Conduct treatment planning
- Present treatment options to the patient
- Discuss patient financing options
- Submit insurance claims
- Reconcile and post payments
- Schedule follow-up appointments and recare
- Handle specialty referrals inbound and outbound
- Ask for online recommendations & reviews
- Identify gaps and opportunities for efficiency improvement
- Discover tools and features already in your software and hardware that will help you achieve greater efficiency
- Discuss with the team what will have the greatest impact
- Determine the key metrics you will measure to evaluate success
- Document changes by updating written SOPs (standard operating procedures)
- Establish a deadline for full adoption of the updated SOPs
- Conduct team training
- Track key metrics and report on success

**Another way to leverage technology is to train new team members, especially if they are temps.**



If I'm a hygienist or a dental assistant, I need to decide which practice I want to come temp for? That's going to be impacted by which software I know. So, this is an interesting time to be thinking not just about staffing, but also about **how we are training and supporting new team members.**

*Jill Nesbitt*



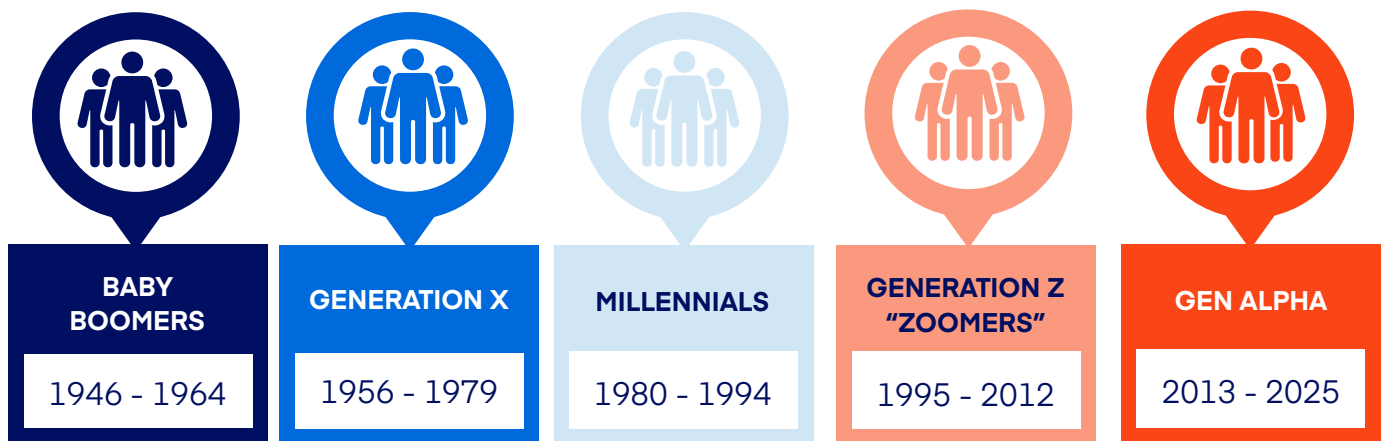
# Psst... Millennials are 40 and This is What They Want

Having modern technology can help attract high-quality talent, and it can help streamline many tasks to save time and energy.

## NEED ANOTHER REASON TO ADD TECHNOLOGY TO HELP YOUR STRESSED-OUT TEAM?

Your patients expect you to have it. From online scheduling to electronic appointment reminders to automated text-to-pay messages, your patients prioritize convenience and time-saving tools that let them manage their healthcare appointments and bills efficiently.

### WHO'S IN YOUR PATIENT BASE?



### WHAT'S DRIVING PATIENTS TO CHOOSE ONE PRACTICE OVER ANOTHER

	BOOMERS	YOUNGER GENERATIONS
Online appointment scheduling	40%	73%
Cost	38.7%	52.8%
Convenient billing & payment options	32.3%	44.1%
Used voice search to find practice	35%	30%
Used mobile application to arrange medical visit	25%	7%

Source: [Press Ganey](#)



## ONE EXAMPLE WHERE TECHNOLOGY CAN HELP: ONLINE SCHEDULING



**85%** dental appointments scheduled by phone

(2021) [Source: Dental economics](#)



**73%** of Millennials & Zoomers prefer online appointment scheduling to phone calls

[Source: Press Ganey](#)



**26%** dental practices offer online booking

[Source: nexhealth](#)



### Timeline of Online Scheduling

**1996: Travelocity**  
Online Scheduling

**1998: Open Table**  
Online Scheduling

**2009: ZocDoc**  
Online Scheduling

[Source: Dental Economics](#)

### PROPOSED PHRASING TO USE WITH YOUR TEAM:



We want to make your job easier. **We want you to enjoy what you are doing and feel like how you spend your time is meaningful and efficient.**

We have invested in tools and technology that can do a lot of the work we used to do manually, and want to make sure we're using it to free up your time to focus on patients as much as possible.

*Jill Nesbitt*



# Create a Workplace Culture That Attracts and Retains Talented Team Members

There are a lot of books, podcasts, and programs about how to create a great workplace culture.

Josey Sewell specializes in setting up systems that create cohesive teams and well-run workplaces, where people want to join and want to stay.

**Your core values are an essential set of guiding principles,** and Sewell recommends using them to evaluate your hires and team members.

## HEAD, HEART, HANDS EVALUATION CRITERIA

Sewell calls it, “Head, heart, hands.”

She recommends writing out your core values and then developing one to two behavioral-based interview questions for each value.

For example, if the core value is being growth-oriented, you may want to ask, “Tell me about a time when you took on a responsibility that helped you grow professionally.”

She developed a “Fit Filter” guideline in association with the Dentist Entrepreneur Organization that can be [accessed here](#).

**Once you hire somebody, it’s important to use that first 90 days to confirm the person is the right fit for your company.**

That’s another way hiring temps can benefit dental practices, said Ian Prendergast.

“If you have a chance to bring on somebody in a part-time capacity and confirm they’re the right fit, you’ll save yourself so much time and energy and money and headache,” said Prendergast.



**Head**  
Right knowledge base



**Heart**  
Excited to have the position



**Hands**  
Right skills for the job



When we have **great team members aligned with the vision, who live our core values, who have clear expectations and see a path for growth within our organization,** they are going to be happier, they are going to be more productive, and they are going to refer their friends to come work for you.

Josey Sewell



# Strategies to Retain Awesome Team Members

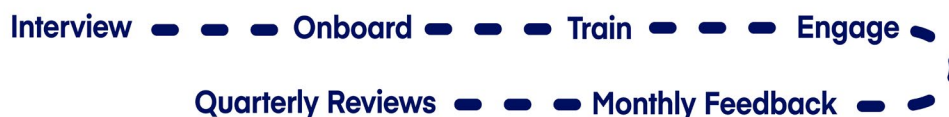
**In a competitive job environment, how do you retain your talented team members?**

One way is by ditching the old idea of annual reviews. Instead, create a feedback cycle.






Several dental practices and groups have started “stay” interviews in addition to exit interviews. Current employees are asked to share their thoughts about what is working and what could be better.

Josey Sewell recommends the **5Ps framework**, developed in association with the Dentist Entrepreneur Organization.

The framework helps team members set personal and professional goals that matter to them and help their employers better support them.



## THE 5 PS FRAMEWORK

	<b>Power</b>	Taking care of yourself mentally, emotionally and physically
	<b>Purpose</b>	Understanding how your actions help others
	<b>People</b>	Connecting with others in a meaningful way
	<b>Prosperity</b>	Recognizing what brings fulfillment
	<b>Perform</b>	Measuring the output of your effort

Source: [The Dentist Entrepreneur Organization](#)



Many practices find they could probably **do 50% more** with their current team if they knew how to engage them and unlock their human potential and energy.

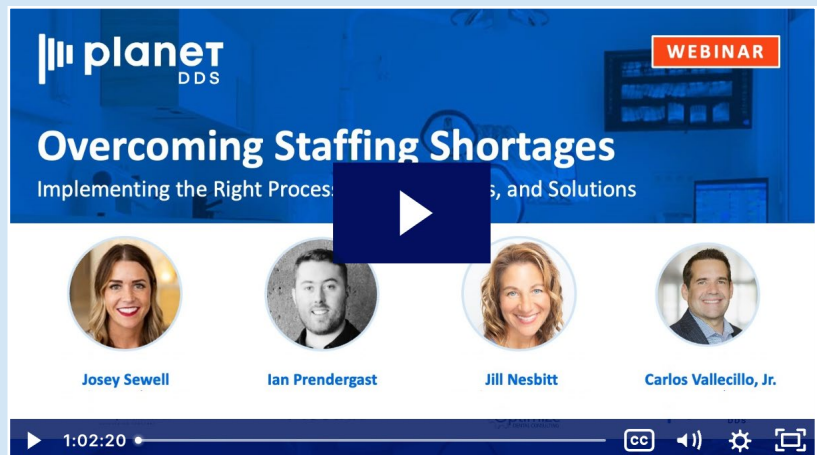
Josey Sewell



# Learn More

Register for an on-demand webinar with Ian, Jill, and Josey to learn more about how to increase engagement for your team and unlock their full potential.

[WATCH ON-DEMAND](#)



**Find out how you can leverage Planet DDS solutions to support your team members.**

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