‘She has computer experience ...’

(Just not the kind your office needs)

How to determine if a potential employee has the necessary skills and experience a position requires

By Sally McKenzie, CEO

“Experience,” It’s a word that conveys different meanings to different people. When seeking employment, applicants naturally want to convince their prospective bosses that they bring the necessary experience to the position. Meanwhile, employers — dentists specifically — often are in the difficult position of trying to fill vacancies quickly. Many don’t typically need a lot of convincing that the applicant with the pleasant smile and friendly demeanor is the one for their office, particularly when the applicant asserts that she/he has what it takes to do the job.

A scenario

Let’s look at “Dr. Carrel.” His business employee of 12 years decided it was time for a change of scenery and accepted a position out of state. That left Dr. Carrel frantically trying to fill this position. In walks applicant “Amanda.”

Amanda has worked as a receptionist and a clerk in the children’s department at a large retail store, which must mean that she’s good with people and well organized. “Both are very important qualities for this job,” a stressed Carrel notes to himself.

During the interview, Carrel dutifully covers the usual questions with Amanda, listening closely for those things he wants to hear.

“Do you have experience with scheduling?” asks Carrel.

“Certainly,” Amanda says. Meanwhile, she’s thinking to herself: I have to get in the shower by 7 a.m., at the gym by 5:30 p.m. so I can be out with friends by 8 p.m. “Yes, I am very good at scheduling.”

“Do you have computer training?”

“Of course,” Amanda says emphatically. In her mind she ticks through countless hours of training and practical experience in effective communicating with others? “Yes, I have lots of computer experience.”

“How would you rate your experience in effectively communicating with others? "Very high," answers Amanda. You should see my thumbs go. I can text message while driving, applying make-up, even during a movie. “I consider myself to be an expert communicator.”

As the story goes, Amanda is hired with the understanding that she is bringing all her “technical expertise” to the position.

While the scenario above may be somewhat exaggerated, it is not uncommon for practices to hire new employees that bring “experience,” “knowledge” and “training” in numerous areas, but oftentimes, it’s not what the practice needs or what the job really requires.

Specific computer literacy is essential

Practice needs and expectations have changed. Managing a dental practice has always demanded excellent customer service skills and knowledge of dental business systems such as scheduling, financial arrangements, insurance processing, collection and billing, recall, etc.

Yet, today the need for specific computer literacy is significantly greater.

Even jobs that would not necessarily be described as “technical” commonly require computer experience or technical skills. Dental practice employees — both clinical and business — are often expected to understand and use spreadsheet, word-processing and database software.

Although an applicant may bring some computer experience, it doesn’t mean she/he has the compulsory knowledge to access and interpret necessary reports or compile spreadsheets.

Historically, a college degree in business was not a requirement to get a position in the dental business office, and many people employed at the front office were former dental assistants or people who were trained on the job in another practice.

In addition, although most of the generations X and Y and Millennials (those coming of age in the new millennium) have been exposed to computers virtually their entire lives, if they do not go on to college or receive specific training, the skills often remain elementary.

Yesterday’s expert is today’s amateur

When hiring someone to manage a busy practice, formal business training and more than a basic knowledge of computer software is essential.

The practice management reports that can be generated by today’s sophisticated software will tell you virtually everything you must know about your practice:

• whether it is growing or declining,
• what procedures are your “bread and butter,”
• what other services or products you need to market,
Office manager skills test for new hires

Step 1: Create a ‘dummy’ patient in the computer.

Step 2: Ask the applicant to:
- assemble a treatment plan for this patient.
- schedule multiple appointments for this patient.
- post from the treatment plan.
- gather insurance information on this patient.
- create a treatment proposal.
- create a financial option sheet.

Step 3: Now that you know the applicant’s skill level, ask yourself:
- Will the investment necessary to bring this person up to speed be too great?
- Do the applicant’s strengths outweigh her/his weaknesses?
- Can the shortfalls in her/his skill levels be overcome with proper technical training?

About the author

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