Hiring and firing
Finding new team members and having to let certain ones go are two of the most complex tasks to handle as a manager, says Sharon Holmes

I n all the time I’ve been in a management position, I still find finding hiring new staff one of the trickiest tasks to handle. I’ve learned that this is the one of the responsibilities as an employer you should never take lightly. The process as smooth as possible, you need to follow some good advice. It also helps to structure the process and have a strict protocol that you adhere to.

The BDA offers booklets that cover all aspects of management issues, especially with the legal side of employment being so stringent. Here at the Dental Arts Studio, we follow its guidelines which suggest that once you’ve advertised for a new position and carried out interviews, you must ask for references from previous employers.

Carrying out references
We use a reference request form, which contains some very specific questions with regards to work ethos, trust and attendance, for example. Sometimes we ask the questions telephonically and fill in the form to keep on record. The previous employer is legally bound not to give too much away with regards to an ex employee’s character, however, any intelligent person can work out what is being said to them without much being said at all.

I have made the fatal mistake in the past, of taking on staff purely on the fact that they’ve interviewed exceptionally well. They are well presented, well spoken, smile or laugh in all the right places and have all their answers worked out as they’ve learned what employers want to hear.

I have been told by some of my staff that when they’ve had their CV’s professionally written up, agencies have embellished the truth to increase their chances of finding new staff for their clients. This is rather a scary thought as it can lead us into some serious situations. I can’t prove that this actually happened at Dental Arts Studio, but because I know it might, I like to be cautious. I have learned never to work blindly, as it causes many sleepless nights.

Once I have completed the reference check and am happy with it, I then send them an offer of employment letter which states details of their start date, salary, work hours and holiday entitlement. Before their first day of employment, I invite them to the practice where I carry out a two-hour induction with regards to practice procedures and protocols. They are also given all the required paperwork, which includes their contract and practice policies manual. I give them one week to read through all these documents and make sure that I receive the signed contract which includes an appendix for health and safety and their job description which also requires a signature. Once I have all the required paperwork back to me, it is placed into their personal folder which is locked away in line with the confidentiality act.

Making tough decisions
Sometimes when relationships don’t work out between any member of staff and the practice, tough decisions need to be made. They are never pleasant and are always a source for discomfort and unhappiness. If procedures are not followed by the book, as a practice manager or an employer you are inviting a tribunal into your already stressful working environment.

I always take full advantage of the legal team at the British Dental Association who are very thorough in the information and guidance that they provide. Sometimes the advice is not always what you want to hear and it can be very frustrating, but they know what they are talking about and I follow it wholeheartedly.

When employees start to cause chaos in the practice, I never hesitate to invite them to an informal hearing to discuss the problems that are occurring. Many times it only takes one verbal warning and the problems cease, however sometimes it continues sporadically and you need to then invite them to a second hearing. If it ultimately leads to a dismissal and the member of staff raises a grievance, you have all the paperwork in order and documented which is then hard for them to argue with. I never simply dismiss anyone. When an employee is not coping at work, I look at creating a strategy for training and nurturing, I put the time in and when the results are good and I can see an improvement I am pleased for the practice and the employer as it means less disruption to the team having to go through the process of replacement. Training a new member of staff is time consuming and also costs money as I could be doing something more positive towards the business development side of practice.

Rules are in place for a reason and if we follow them, we don’t get hurt as much when things go wrong. It is time consuming and involves some commitment towards paperwork, but it really is worth following the rules.

As American philosopher William James once said: ‘Whenever you’re in conflict with someone, there is one factor that can make the difference between damaging your relationship and deepening it. The factor is attitude.’

About the author
Sharon Holmes
Originally from South Africa, Sharon Holmes moved to the UK in 2002. She thoroughly enjoys her position as business development manager at the Dental Arts Studio and her role in the dental industry, which has moulded her into a winner in her field. She believes that her position is based on common sense.