

In the Dentist's Office

A Guide for Auxiliary Dental Personnel

2nd
Edition

- Hygienist
- Assistant
- Secretary

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Preface

"In the Dentist's Office" had its genesis when the author was an executive dental assistant in Boston. It was apparent at that time that there was great need for a textbook that would help train office personnel in not only the fundamental duties of a dental assistant but the auxiliary and managerial duties as well.

Later, when the author became a lecturer and dental practice analyst, this need was made even more evident, for dentists frankly declared that an assistant can be a "right arm" to the dentist if she has the proper training.

Not all dentists are able to spend the time and effort necessary to train their employees.

The experience of the author as an instructor and her experience with the practical application of those teachings in a wide range of dental offices has given her an extensive knowledge of the requisites for personnel efficiency in a dental office.

Capable contributors have added valuable material to help make this a complete text.

The finished text is an answer to the questions of three members of the dental office staff: (1) the assistant who asks, "How can I advance myself by being more valuable to my employer?"; (2) the dentist who asks, "How can I train my assistant so that she can assume the executive responsibilities, thus enabling me to concentrate on the more scientific services for my patients?"; (3) the hygienist who asks, "Where can I take a refresher course after graduating from Dental Hygienists' School?"

It is also an answer to the many class members of the author who have repeatedly asked for a reference book to supplement the classwork.

Because a variety of persons from a variety of practices will read this text, the author has incorporated in every chapter a flexibility in the procedures, but the fundamental principles remain the same for every successful dental office.

The duties of the dentist and his auxiliary personnel are interdependent. A deficiency in one department is automatically reflected in another.

Therefore, the dentist, as well as his assistant, should make a study of this text so that a mutual understanding of the duties of each may be attained.

Reader and office benefit only as applications are made. The reader is asked to compare this material with her own knowledge, experience, and personality and to adapt it to the history and circumstances of her particular office. In this way the value of the text will be increased by personal interest and practical analysis.

G. A. M.

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"O blithe newcomer! I have heard,
I hear thee and rejoice."-Wordsworth

IN THE DENTIST'S OFFICE

What It Takes

Every well-organized dental office now employs one or more auxiliary personnel. The time and the money that can be saved by relieving the doctor of nonproductive duties have more than justified their presence in the dental practice.

To what extent such personnel prove their worth in any office depends upon their application of the knowledge and the training that they might have gained before association in this office, plus constant study and observation while engaged as auxiliary personnel members. The girl who assumes personal responsibility for the office routine will soon find the dentist co-operating by delegating to her complete authority in business matters as well as assistance in scientific duties in most of the productive services.

The assistant is usually a high school graduate and sometimes a college graduate. Although numerous courses of training for assistants are available, probably not all women will have had such prejob education. Whether or not they are fortified with this background, it will be desirable for them to pursue further self-improvement. Text-books, educational literature and refresher courses will help to keep the diligent assistant and hygienist in step with the march of progress.

Probably no group of people take more courses than dentists. Postgraduate and refresher courses are a natural part of their annual activities. Likewise, the assistant must supplement her knowledge so that she may keep in step with the march of progress of her doctor. Only in this way can she hope to meet successfully the ever-increasing competition in her business and professional world.

It will be of future value to all concerned if a written account of the remunerative plan, the delegated duties and other pertinent factors involved in the retaining of a new employee be placed in the possession of the employer and the employee at the time that such arrangements are concluded.

A regular monthly (or more frequent) organization meeting is recommended as a fundamental factor in discussing office problems most effectively.

I feel that the apparent inadequacy of members of an auxiliary personnel is due mostly to the lack of attention given by the dentist to the matter of discussing office problems in an intelligent, constructive and pleasant manner.

Monthly meetings should be arranged for every office that has one or more employees. These organization meetings can be of outstanding value when all the members of the personnel, including the doctor, make notes of suggestions for discussion during the intervening time.

These ideas will be communicated effectively if every person places his suggestions in a box that is provided in a strategic location. The demanding pressure of the daily routine in most offices makes it impossible to deal with all problems as they arise. It is much better to handle them at times when all possibilities may be thoroughly explored, as during the organization or staff meeting.

This will usually result in a better delegation of duties to members of the auxiliary personnel and suggestions for the most satisfactory execution of such duties.

There is no better way to keep the spark of enthusiasm glowing for one's everyday endeavor than constantly to inject improved ideas for our applied efforts.

Through these organization meetings the auxiliary personnel learn ways and means for improving general routine in the office and thus apply all personal qualities to the best advantage.

A definite organization meeting, say once a week, will afford an excellent opportunity for the assistant, the secretary, the hygienist and any other personnel members to sit down with the doctor and discuss the office problems. This organization meeting is especially necessary to establish duties for each employee and to encourage the assistant and her co-workers to assume greater responsibilities and to achieve smoother teamwork.

QUALIFICATIONS

Let us consider the basic qualities that will make the dental assistant, the secretary or the hygienist better than average in any office.

1. Well-groomed appearance
2. Enthusiasm
3. Initiative

4. Loyalty
5. Smile and diplomacy of a hostess
6. Tenderness and understanding of a mother
7. Business ability of a secretary
8. Knowledge and appreciation of dentistry
9. Alertness of a nurse
10. Ability of a housekeeper
11. Good health
12. Patience and fortitude

WELL-GROOMED APPEARANCE

Occasionally, we meet someone who gives us the impression of harmony and pleasantness; and when whatever contact we have had with that person is ended, we become conscious that she possessed a particularly magnetic quality. Thus it is that a well-groomed person impresses us with her cleanliness and neatness, and yet we cannot, after her departure, recall an outstanding feature of her apparel. In other words, her appearance is the essence of harmony. Psychologists tell us that if we would improve ourselves we should study such persons, applying what we learn to our own attitude toward life.

One of the basic requirements of good appearance for either the assistant or the doctor is cleanliness. Probably no line of endeavor demands so much cleanliness of the body and personal hygiene as does dentistry, not only because we work so close to patients but also because we are supposed to be teachers of health and appearance.

It behooves all personnel members to give meticulous attention to careful grooming of the hair, the nails and the teeth. The use of deodorants on the body is desirable.

The body must be kept clean, both inside and out. It would seem unnecessary to mention this in the present age of cleanliness, but apparently some assistants have not learned the value of frequent bathing, the use of deodorants on the body and the drinking of quantities of water, combined with a sound basic nutritional program. This is a subject that may seem very delicate but should be given every consideration and discussed intelligently among the office personnel.

Everyone is more "hygiene conscious" now than ever before, and the individual who does not deem it necessary to bathe often and well, besides keeping internally clean, is flirting with "unemployment" (if an assistant) or "lack of patients" (if a doctor).

Jewelry, such as earrings, should be omitted for a professional appearance. Not all patients approve of the use of colored nail polish, which resembles blood; therefore, only colorless polish should be worn.

A uniform that is professional in appearance will be the choice of every well-groomed assistant and hygienist. There is a growing trend toward the use of pastel-colored uniforms of "quick dry" material or broadcloth. These make practical as well as attractive professional attire, and caps can be made of matching material.

Whether a white or colored uniform is selected, it should be clean and free of pins or holes. It always seems to me that the girl who is careless about her professional attire has little respect for the profession with which she is associated. Let us look the part as well as act the part.

The white cap is generally accepted and is recommended by the writer for several reasons. It helps to keep the hair in place and protects it against the engine belt; it adds to the assistant's dignity and decorum; and it indicates an association with a branch of the medical profession. The cap may be a plain one, such as is sold in most department stores. If she is a member of the American Dental Assistants Association, she may wear the official cap of that organization.

White shoes and hose are not only necessary for harmonious appearance but are an essential hygienic and economic feature. The use of white hose means that the assistant will change from her street hose in the morning and back again when she goes out to lunch or home in the evening. This procedure of changing hose does not take long. It is an excellent hygienic practice and one that saves wear on street hose. A comfortable, low-heel operating shoe is desirable for the assistant or hygienist who must spend many hours of the day standing and walking. High heels or any run-over heels are taboo.

Perfumes are not in good taste for the professionally attired person. Every patient does not enjoy the same perfume, and its use denotes a lack of the fitness which is essential to a dignified dental assistant. However, a mild-scented sachet may be used with discretion.

Gum-chewing and trivial conversation are not agreeable to any type of patient. Because of her connection with the medical profession, the dental office assistant should try to keep herself a little ahead of the average "office girl." Her appreciation of the importance of this should influence also her personal appearance and mannerisms.

ENTHUSIASM

Enthusiasm is the most contagious quality of any personality. The person who is enthusiastic can lift another person's morale to great heights. Surely there is room for much enthusiasm on the part of the associate, as she must stimulate most of the patients to a happier attitude toward dentistry and her office. Few, if any, patients come to a dental office with enthusiasm about having dental services rendered. Usually they come for something which they consider a necessary evil. Moreover, they must pay for this experience, and they fall into a negative rather than a pleasant attitude. Therefore, the assistant's pleasant and enthusiastic personality can be of tremendous value in making the patient happy.

Enthusiasm is built on one's own interest in his work or subject. It is so important to one's success that the writer Emerson once said, "Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm." Disraeli believed that, "Every production of genius must be the production of enthusiasm."

It has been my observation that the auxiliary personnel members who are enjoying the most rewarding careers are those who are not necessarily endowed with spectacular ability but rather have the necessary ingenuity and enthusiasm to motivate them into studying constantly, so that they are proficient not in only one phase of their profession but in all phases.

The need for such auxiliary personnel, all with gifts fully developed, has increased in direct proportion to the ingenuity and the complexities of our dentists' technics and problems.

Certainly it would be difficult for any auxiliary personnel member to develop all desired potentialities if she were not blessed with *enthusiasm*.

Enthusiasm gives "sparkle" to the personality and helps carry us through many unpleasant experiences in life more smoothly than if we were governed by a phlegmatic interest in our responsibilities.

INITIATIVE

Here is a quality that greatly helps one to take the lead. The dental office assistant must be able to anticipate the needs of the doctor and of the office. This includes up-to-the-minute control of the appointment book, stimulation of collections and anticipating and meeting in advance the doctor's professional requirements for various operating procedures. We are not nearly so important when we must be told what to do as when we anticipate the needs of the doctor and the office in general. The assistant who has managerial

ability and uses her initiative to discover causes and cures for problems of the practice is a valuable employee and can be replaced only with difficulty.

LOYALTY

Honor and uprightness are innate qualities that contribute to that admirable requisite, loyalty. The dental office associate must be loyal to the profession and to her doctor at all times. Regardless of the trend of conversation outside of the office, she refrains from reference to the confidences of the office, such as cases, fees or matters that are of personal interest to her employer. She will always speak well of the profession and do everything possible to create and maintain confidence in her doctor. To speak disparagingly about anyone with whom we are associated is merely a reflection on ourselves. How much better to say, "I am sure I am associated with the best dentist in town," than to say anything that might depreciate the doctor's prestige.

It is, indeed, regrettable that more people are not given to complimenting their co-workers. The assistant has diplomatic methods by which she can occasionally compliment her doctor, and the dentist will certainly have many reasons to compliment a worthy employee. If there is no reason justifying such a compliment, then the office is better off without the employee.

An assistant should be a valuable "buffer" and "diplomat" for her office.

SMILE AND DIPLOMACY OF A HOSTESS

There are only two reasons for not smiling pleasantly when the occasion warrants it: a neglected mouth or an unfriendly mind. Neither of these should be the possession of the assistant, as she should reflect her belief in good dentistry by having her teeth in keeping with modern dentistry, and her manner should be gracious toward every patient. When we come in contact with a person who creates static in communication by building a wall around himself, we find that feelings and expressions are frozen, and it is most difficult to "get through" to such a person. This is sometimes referred to as his moodiness but is really a negative temper of mind. It is an unhealthy attitude for any member of the personnel to cultivate. True, some patients are less agreeable than others, but since they are the doctor's patients and consequently help to make the assistant's livelihood possible, they are deserving of every courtesy of the office. In this respect, one must actually have the ability of an actress. No matter what negative attitude creeps up on us, it