

# Earning Your Slice of the Pie: Making the Most of Your Salary Review

By Larry M. Guzzardo

Employers and employees should meet annually to discuss salaries and other compensation. If your employer doesn't take the initiative and if you're dissatisfied with your salary and benefits, it's up to you to initiate the review.

Salary reviews should not be confused with performance reviews. At a performance review, the employer and employee discuss job responsibilities and abilities. Conferences set up to review employee salaries center on compensation and should take place in conjunction with the annual practice review and fee increases.

Your performance review, however, does provide the objectivity necessary to help both parties determine whether you have the skills and talent to justify an increase. Showing up every day and putting in an average performance won't do.

Dentists generally want to pay fair wages. If you can show you're handling tasks outside of your existing job description, the dentist will be more likely to grant you a meaningful raise. Your case will be even stronger if you can prove that you do those tasks well.

Consider how you've consistently met or exceeded the goals of your department and the practice. If you can't do that, the dentist has little to risk by denying your request.

Your attitude is important. Be confident of your request, but also be professional. If your employer refuses your request, remain clam and logical. Becoming angry and defensive won't help you achieve your goal. An unwise thing to say goes something like this: "I've been a good staff member and I'm entitled."

Instead, ask how you can increase your value to the practice. Let your employer know that you're interested in a solution that works for you and the practice. Your work should achieve results in key practice systems including treatment acceptance, production, number of new patients each month and of broken and canceled appointments. Monitor the progress made and track your results.

Dentists need staff members who know more than the technical aspects of their job. Staff members who can study an office system containing or contributing to a problem, evaluate the roadblocks and decide what should be adjusted are in demand.

In the last decade, dentists have relied more on -- and rewarded -- staff members with better decision-making skills. Besides basic skills and a positive attitude, the dentist-employer wants staff members who:

- are punctual;
- demonstrate good teamwork skills;
- accept responsibility willingly;
- promote a professional image;
- are dependable;
- successfully complete tasks;
- respects authority;
- possess a positive self-concept.

## Making the Most of Your Salary Review...

When you meet with your employer to discuss your career development, salary and benefit requirements, present your accomplishments in writing. A short report listing how you've contributed to the practice helps the dentist understand your worth.

To effectively define and recognize your achievements, list specific contributions to the practice, such as the number of patients you have referred to the practice, how you've acted as a role model for others and your ability to teach, coach and mentor others.

Then answer the following questions realistically and truthfully:

- What have you done to help build the practice?
- How have you added to the successful image of the practice?
- What are some examples of your teamwork?
- Are your technical and professional abilities being fully used?
- How could they be used more fully?
- What could be done by the team to increase production and efficiency?
- What can you do to increase production and efficiency?
- What can be done to decrease overhead in the office?
- What can you do to enhance interoffice communication?

Your answers are a good indicator whether you're likely to receive the raise you want.

After reviewing the report, the employer may ask about:

- your salary goal -- remember this is justified by the results you've already listed;
- desired benefits other than financial compensation;
- steps you would like to take to help yourself grow professionally;
- how the practice and dentist could help you grow.

Assuming you're successful in getting a raise or other compensation, continue developing your skills. Increasingly, employers are relying on staff members to take responsibility for their own career development. Continuing education is an excellent way for staff members to learn according to individual needs and experience.

Today, the demands of a dental practice present extreme challenges to staff members seeking to achieve personal goals. The shift that has occurred rewards those who are current in continuing education requirements and training. It is extremely important that you invest in your career regularly if you want to increase your value to the dental team.

*Larry M. Guzzardo who has co-authored two books, "Powerful Practice" and "Getting Things Done" conducts in-office practice management consultations exclusively for dentists to enhance trust, create organization, increase profits, and the development of patient relationships that last. Larry has presented numerous workshops including, "Winning Patient Acceptance," "Business Communication Systems," and "The Leadership Challenge." For more information call 800-782-5770.*

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