

# The Great Resignation Cure

## How Pediatric Dental Leaders Attract, Inspire, and Keep Top Talent Without Raising Pay

For today's growing pediatric dental practice, talent turnover is one of the greatest threats to continuity, culture, and quality patient care. Research shows that the average dental employee tenure is only two to three years, forcing practices to fill roles, often under urgent timelines.

The temptation is to either search for quick fixes or wait for the "perfect hire." However, if practice leaders take a step back and address the root challenge facing the practice, the truth becomes clear: great leadership attracts and keeps great employees.

### WHAT IS THE TOTAL COST OF TURNOVER?

Replacing a dental team member can cost 30% to 50% of their annual salary when factoring in recruitment, onboarding, and lost productivity. Beyond financial impact, turnover disrupts the team

culture, affects the patient experience, and drains practice leadership energy. Every employee departure sets the tone for those who remain or those considering leaving as well.

According to DentalPost's 2024 Workforce Survey, 63% of dental professionals reported feeling undervalued at work, and 41% have considered leaving due to poor leadership or lack of growth opportunities.

Simply put, when an employee feels undervalued, the employee will seek that validation somewhere else. When a leader models personal responsibility, positivity, and consistency, others follow. A leader who invests in self-awareness, emotional regulation, and clear communication lays the foundation for a workplace others want to be part of.

## SHOULD THE PRACTICE INVEST IN POTENTIAL OR EXPERIENCE?

Some of the most committed team members didn't come with perfect résumés or all the desired experience. Instead, the leaders took the initiative to coach, support, and develop the new employee into a high performer. "Leaders see more than others see, and they see it before others do." —John C. Maxwell

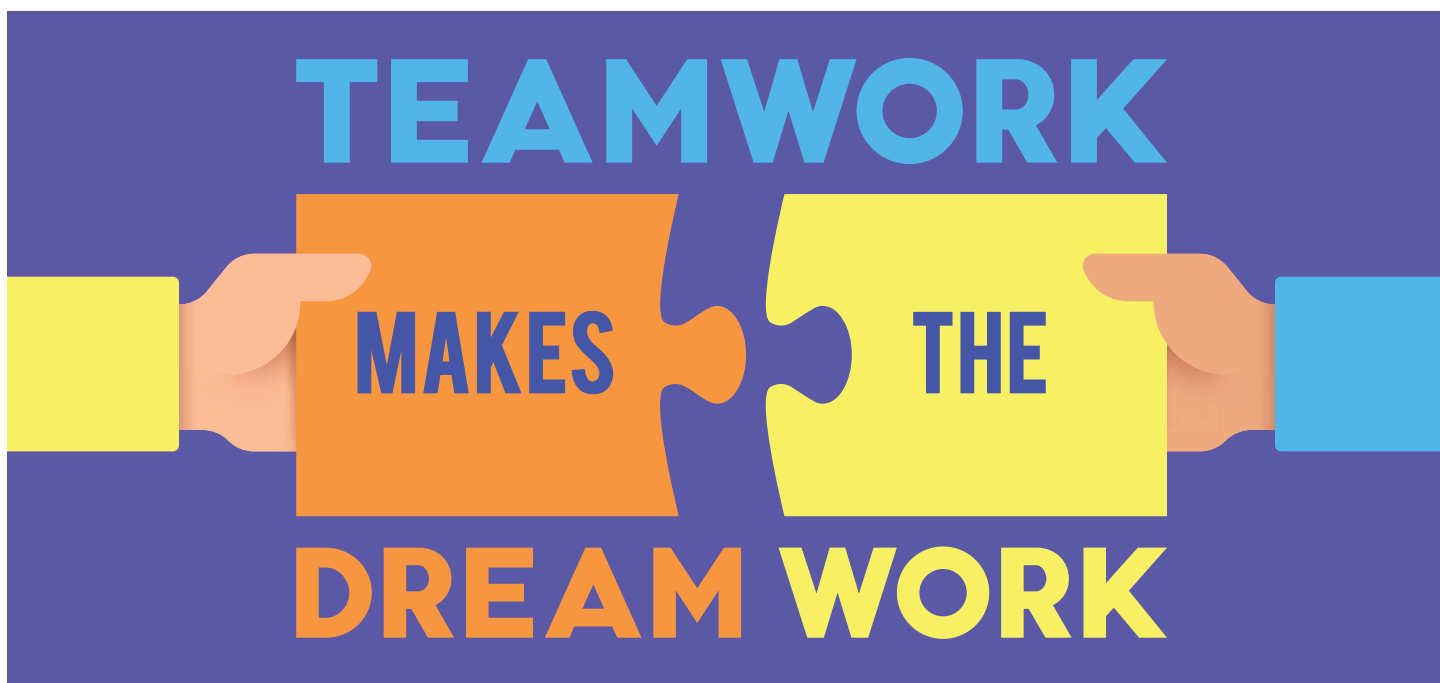
In 2021, Dr. Rivera struggled to retain her administrative team. Instead of cycling through candidates, she hired a receptionist with no dental experience but exceptional customer service skills. With a six-month development plan and weekly coaching, that hire became her office manager within 18 months. Today, Dr. Rivera has a waitlist of people who want to work in her practice.

What made the difference for Dr. Rivera? Clear values-based hiring criteria, structured onboarding programs, consistent check-ins, and leadership visibility. Even though the hiring pool may not be as rich as it was before COVID, there are still a variety of things practice leaders can do to attract and retain employees.



## Leadership insight when training new team members without experience:

1. **"Why" can be much more empowering than "what".** Avoid only training tasks. Teach the employee the reasoning behind the task. Explain why a certain tone calms nervous parents and why phrasing matters in treatment planning or preventive care calls. When the employee understands the ideal outcome or goal of the task, they can learn to pivot when challenges arise.
2. **Provide frequent quick coaching moments.** Leaders can use this simple coaching structure: "Here's what I saw. Here's what I loved. Here's one thing to try next time." These "mini check-ins" or coaching moments will create a daily rhythm of growth and progress. Sprinkle coaching conversations throughout the day, after a procedure, patient hand-off, or morning huddle.
3. **Consistent recognition:** Great team members stay when they feel seen, heard, and supported. Leaders who commit to providing recognition religiously garner significantly more loyalty. Recognition and growth pathways matter more now than ever. Remember to recognize progress just as much as production. Highlight specific examples of new and veteran team members who handled a difficult parent with poise or went the extra mile for a wow patient experience. Publicly affirm when someone takes initiative, grows in confidence, or shows a new strength. Every employee will benefit from seeing practice leaders recognize the efforts and successes of their team. Try having monthly shout-outs for patient compliments, teamwork, or personal milestone achievements. As Dale Carnegie said, "People work for money but go the extra mile for recognition, praise, and rewards."



## **CULTURE HIGHLY IMPACTS EMPLOYEE RETENTION**

In Clint Pulver's book *I Love It Here*, the author shares extensive research gathered from undercover interviews with employees across various industries. The recurring theme was that employees don't leave companies; they leave their leaders. Pulver notes when asking why some organization better retained their people, "It wasn't the perks or pay that kept employees; it was the mentorship, the appreciation, and the opportunity to be heard." This means leaders have a significant impact on whether their team stays or leaves.

## **IS CULTURE MORE IMPORTANT THAN COMPENSATION?**

A 2023 Gallup poll revealed that 56% of employees would trade a raise for a better boss. The emotional environment, communication style, and consistency of leadership often outweigh compensation in determining employee satisfaction.

So, how is culture created? Well, culture isn't something that can be created with the right mission statement or words in an employee manual.

Culture is built upon the daily actions of the practice leaders. Culture is what people feel every day within the practice walls. From morning huddles to how mistakes are handled, culture is shaped in the small moments. Leaders who create safety, structure, and inspiration attract those who want to belong.

When Kinder Smiles introduced monthly "Mission Moments," where team members shared how they impacted a child's experience, engagement scores rose 26% over six months. Turnover dropped to near zero. The initiative didn't cost the practice a dime, it simply re-centered the mission and gave people a platform to feel valued.

"The greatest compliment a leader can receive is when people say, 'I love it here.'" —Clint Pulver, *I Love It Here*

## **WHAT IF THE PRACTICE INVESTS IN EMPLOYEES AND THEY LEAVE?**

Leadership isn't just about managing tasks—it's about shaping an environment where people **want** to stay, grow, and contribute their best. Especially in pediatric dental practices, where team-

work, emotional resilience, and patient experience are everything, leadership is the invisible force that holds the culture and the team together.

The uncertainty of “what if they leave” becomes less daunting when the environment inspires people to stay.

In the ever-changing landscape of pediatric dentistry, one truth remains constant: successful practices rise on the strength of their people. People are the practice’s truly appreciable asset. The future of every practice isn’t built on hiring the right people. It’s secured by becoming the kind of leader others want to follow.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Leadership is a daily commitment. As Jon Gordon says, “*You don’t get burned out because of what you do, you get burned out because you forget why you do it.*” Great leaders in pediatric dental practices remember their “why” every day: to build a place where people love to work, patients love to visit, and children feel safe, seen, and cared for.

Creating a winning team culture is not a one-time motivational speech or a single great hire. It is the daily, intentional decision to show up with positivity, purpose, and persistence. Checking in with a stressed assistant, recognizing a team member for their calm under pressure, or choosing encouragement over criticism, and connection over control.

Decide today to become the leader you would want to follow—apply these insights and watch the transformation unfold.

“Train people well enough so they can leave.  
Treat them well enough so they don’t want to.”

Sir Richard Branson

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## YOU ARE NOT ALONE!

- 86% OF DENTAL TEAMS REPORT **NEEDING** STRONGER LEADERSHIP
- 80% STRUGGLE WITH **COMMUNICATION ACROSS GENERATIONS**
- POOR** LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNICATION ARE THE **#1** REASON DENTAL STAFF **LEAVE THEIR JOBS.**
- LEADERSHIP** QUALITY IS THE **GREATEST PREDICTOR** OF TEAM PRODUCTIVITY AND PRACTICE CULTURE

### VIRTUAL TRANSFORMATIONAL TEAM EXPERIENCE

- **Real-time** exercises to strengthen team culture
- Skills to elevate patient and parent **communication**
- Tools to **neutralize conflict** with difficult parents
- **Break-out rooms** for implementation and problem solving
- The Secret LCP Formula to **connect** with & lead **ANY** team member