It’s an interesting paradox of these economic times. Although the unemployment rate nationwide remains high and it would seem that the job market would be flooded with able candidates, according to a recent Manpower survey, talent shortages remain a problem. In some cases, employers have become so rigid in what they will accept that some very good, albeit not perfect, candidates are never even considered.

The challenge is that the people available and the skills required by employers do not match up, particularly as businesses seek greater specificity in the skill set. In other words, there may be plenty of talent but it’s not the right talent available in the right place at the right time. For these employers, flexibility is an issue.

However, for dentists, the opposite is too often the case. Typically, dentists are so flexible in their hiring practices, they make JELL-O® look rigid. When a vacancy occurs in the practice, it is common for dentists to focus almost solely on filling the position and give little consideration to the long-term quality of the hire or the specificity of the skills required — particularly if the hire is going to be a business employee.

They may zero in on one line on the resume that indicates a sliver of past dental office experience and consider this applicant to be “the one.” Yet they will disregard a multitude of red flags, such as...
gaps in the resume or frequent job changes. Dentists commonly ignore recommendations to check out references. Too often they are driven by one thought: “How quickly can I get someone, anyone, in here?”

Little or no consideration is given to assessing the likelihood that this person will succeed in the position or what impact the individual will have on the success of the practice over time, or in other words, the “quality of the hire.” That being said, hiring failures can cost a fortune.

The figure commonly tossed about to fill a vacancy is 1.5 times the position’s annual salary. Yet, if the new hire doesn’t work out and you’re filling the position again six or maybe nine months later, you’re looking at doubling the cost, not to mention the frustration.

Thus, it is all the more reason why placing greater attention on the quality of the hire rather than merely filling the slot is tremendously important.

Take steps now to ensure that when the next employee turns in his or her two-weeks’ notice, you’re not spiraling into panic mode and scrambling to merely fill the position. Establish a well-defined hiring procedure.

‘Mission minded’

Recruiting quality employees is a process that goes well beyond the two-line classified ad written in secret code. Look at your mission statement and remind yourself where you want to take your practice. Remember, you’re building a team, a practice and a vision — not just filling a position.

Consider the strengths and weaknesses of your practice as well as your own and those of your employees. Are there voids in employee skills and/or duplication of strengths or weaknesses among the team?

One of the key components of this hiring procedure is a clearly defined job description for every position in your practice. Keep in mind that when an opening occurs, that is the opportunity to closely look at the position and update and/or refine the job description to better address the continually changing needs of the office. A staff opening isn’t the time to be creating the job description from scratch.

In addition, please don’t utter this tired line: “But I don’t like job descriptions because they box people in.” If that’s your excuse for not having job descriptions, I can assure you that your practice also lacks accountability. There are likely significant system breakdowns, and you are losing money hand over fist.

What’s more, if you’re looking for quality applicants to fill the position, not just a warm body, they expect to see a job description. The applicants will want details of precisely what the job entails and the expectations. Vague generalizations about the position that appear in the classified ads will not satisfy a quality applicant.

Next, consider your advertising strategy. What type of applicant do you want to attract, then target your ad to appeal to that particular audience. Place your ad in publications and on websites where prospective candidates are likely to see it. Look well beyond the local paper; consider online newsletters geared toward business employees, management staff as well as the usual dental publications targeting assistants and dental hygienists. Additionally, some dentists have had very good luck using online job advertising services as well.

Screen the applications first by...
‘Gut instincts are no match for good data. A computerized assessment can help you weed through applicants within minutes to find the best candidates for the position.’

narrowing down the list of candidates to those you are most interested in. From there, conduct phone interviews. Be sure that in the phone interviews you ask all of the applicants the same basic questions. Pay attention to tone of voice, word usage and grammar. You should now be able to pare the list down to only those you are most interested in interviewing face to face.

Skills, personality and more
While no applicant is perfect, it’s important to understand each job and what particular attributes a prospective employee needs to have. If your goal is a 98 percent collection rate, you don’t want a candidate who has trouble asking for money — even if she does have a perfect smile and charming personality.

Most importantly: gut instincts are no match for good data. As the school of hard knocks has taught virtually every dentist I know, a seemingly rock-solid resume and practical skills offer no assurance that the person you hire will prove to be the excellent candidate you interview.

The candidates may appear to have the right skill set, but if one has trouble making decisions or the other is overly controlling, today’s seemingly ideal hire can metamorphose into tomorrow’s employment nightmare. Don’t gamble and don’t guess, instead, test the candidates.

Testing tools available in the dental marketplace provide a statistically valid and scientifically based hiring assessment tool for dentists. The computerized assessment measures job applicants against a profile of the “ideal” dental practice employee for each position. The procedure is simple.

Applicants answer a list of questions online. Just minutes later, the dentist receives a statistically reliable report enabling him or her to clearly determine if the candidate under consideration would be a good match for the position being filled. It’s straightforward and accurate.

What’s more, this carefully tested and thoroughly researched hiring tool is fully compliant with the legal requirements associated with employee testing.

Beyond “You’re hired!”
Once the new hire is in the practice, help him or her succeed. Supply the necessary equipment, tools and training needed to perform the job well. Clearly explain what is expected of the employee and how his or her performance will be measured. Provide an office policy manual that explains policies and procedures, such as sick time, holidays, vacation, disciplinary procedures, etc.

In addition, provide routine, ongoing and direct feedback. This constructive direction helps the employee learn the ropes. Finally, schedule performance reviews to assess the new hire’s performance at least twice, and preferably three times, during the first 90 days.

If you take specific steps before, during and after the hiring process, you are far more likely to ensure that quality hires make up your quality team.