

## The Perfect Associate

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I am often asked “What type of person is the perfect associate?” The best answer is “it all depends on why you want an associate to join you and how you view the associate’s role.” Bringing on an associate without defining what role this person will play in your practice can “make or break” a successful experience.

Here are some preliminary guidelines that may help you choose the best fit in the future.

**❖ If you are looking for someone to purchase your practice within a two year period or less, then that person should have several traits.**

The perfect associate should:

1. Possess a dental philosophy that mirrors yours.
2. Have a sincere desire to be an owner. Not someone who is “looking for a job!”
3. Be credit worthy or capable after a one to two year associateship to purchase your business.
4. Immediately form a bond with the dental team. If the team says no, be careful.
5. Demonstrate a work ethic that exceeds the average person.
6. Value the experience of having you as a mentor, if only for a short time.

If your plans are to bring someone on as partner, then all of these traits above are critical.

In addition, the perfect associate should:

1. Possess the ability to interact with more than one dentist and collaboratively make decisions.
2. Understand the value of leaving ego at the door.
3. Have a long term vision of the partnership.
4. If married or with a significant other, know that both parties are committed to the partnership.
5. Demonstrate experience in working with a team. Look for participation in sports, community service groups, volunteer organizations, or activities that are not solely focused on “me” behaviors.

**❖ Bringing in an associate to help you ease your patient load, supplement your income, or to just give you time away from the practice.**

Dentists by nature are entrepreneurial spirits. Of course they need a job after dental school, but be very clear about what you are offering. If you are not offering a true equity position, expect and plan for a revolving door after a couple of years, if not

sooner. It's not that your practice isn't a good deal for them or a great experience, but the majority of dentists still want their own piece of the pie. Do not promise to sell a portion of your practice if that is not what you really want or plan to do. Instead hire the "right type" of person to fill your needs.

The perfect associate should:

1. Be honest and upfront about his or her future plans and desires.
2. Posses the skills and personality that fits your practice culture.
3. Meet all of the legal and ethical standards of your practice.
4. Have a good work ethic. Show up on time; come back from breaks when expected, and stay until the job is finished.
5. Be someone who does not want ownership.
6. Understand and not dispute a reasonable non-competition clause in your associate agreement.

Consider a retired dentist or one who has owned his or her business in the past. ***Most of these dentists are the cream of the crop!*** Their skills are usually superior and their ability to work with dental team members and patients is exceptional. They have no desire to steal your business away; rather they thrive on enjoying the clinical experience of patient treatment and they can usually adjust to any schedule...one day, two days, four days one week and one day the next week, etc.

The "perfect associate" is an exaggeration. Don't be fooled. The "perfect practice" is too! However, defining what you are truly looking for in an associate relationship is the most logical and honest way to approach bringing someone into your practice. With an established objective, you begin your relationship on the right foot. I believe there are three parts to every business, the financial aspect, the operational aspect, and most importantly the relationship aspect. When you know why you want an associate and are able to target that type of individual, your opportunity for success increases exponentially.