



PRIVATE DENTAL PRACTICE • 2026

The Dental Practice Interview & Vetting Playbook

Scenario-based prompts for hiring associate dentists who convert treatment plans and hygienists who stay past month 12.

54.1% of dental professionals report burnout (GoTu/ADHA 2026)	60.6% of hygienists report burnout (workload & culture, 2026)	65.7% of hygienists cite workload as leading driver (ADHA April 2026)	82.8% plan to remain in dentistry at least 10 more years (ADHA April 2026)
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Hiring dental professionals in 2026 requires evaluating clinical confidence, case presentation skill, and burnout resistance with equal rigor. Standard interview questions yield associate dentists who can't convert treatment plans and hygienists who leave at month six because of office pace. The two scenario-based prompts below are the ones TPG uses on every direct-hire candidate before they reach your office.

Prompt 1 — Associate Dentist Case Acceptance & Presentation

Most dental practices believe their case acceptance rate is around 90%. According to Dental Economics analysis by Roger Levin DDS, the reality is often 30 percentage points lower than the estimate. A 2016 DentistryIQ/Levin Group survey documented dentists persuading patients to move forward with treatment only 61% of the time on average. Dental Intelligence reports case acceptance rates for two-thirds of U.S. practices fall between 20% and 50%. An associate dentist who cannot convert comprehensive treatment plans leaves chairs empty — the most expensive form of underperformance in dental practice management.

ASK THIS VERBATIM

"Imagine a new patient presents with extensive dental neglect requiring a combination of endodontic therapy, several restorative fillings, and a multi-unit crown-and-bridge case. Walk me through exactly how you would co-diagnose this with the patient using our intraoral cameras or scanners and digital radiography to achieve high case acceptance — without making the patient feel like they're being sold a corporate treatment package."

What to Listen For

- **Strong signal:** Candidate visually educates with images on a chairside monitor; sequences treatment by clinical urgency and insurance benefit; explicitly partners with treatment coordinator or front office for benefit estimates.
- **Weak signal:** Candidate describes presenting full treatment value in dollars first without clinical sequencing or patient education context.
- **Red flag:** Candidate views the front office as adversarial; doesn't use intraoral imagery; treats objection-handling as sales pressure.

Prompt 2 — Hygienist Pace, Burnout Resistance & Ergonomics



“Burnout remains high, affecting 54.1 percent of all dental professionals and 60.6 percent of hygienists, driven largely by workload and office culture.”

GoTu / ADHA 2026 State of Work Report (n ≈ 7,900 dental professionals)

The structural hygienist shortage means top hygienists have their pick of practices. ADHA's April 2026 Position Statement documents that 65.7% of hygienists cite workload and 62.4% cite toxic office culture as primary burnout drivers — while 62% report greater clinical autonomy would increase their likelihood of remaining in the profession. Hiring a hygienist who explicitly understands their workflow limits is the cheapest retention strategy you have.

ASK THIS VERBATIM

“The dental hygienist shortage means you have your choice of practices. To ensure this is a long-term fit, imagine our office is running a full, highly productive schedule. Walk me through what specific structural boundaries — 45-minute versus 60-minute prophylaxis blocks, dedicated dental assistant or sterilization support, instrumentation quality, ergonomic seating — are absolutely vital for you to maintain a high standard of care without experiencing physical fatigue or administrative burnout?”

What to Listen For

- **Strong signal:** Candidate immediately discusses ergonomic positioning, scaling instrument quality, ultrasonic preference, and pace; asks about how the office manages accelerated schedules.
- **Weak signal:** Candidate “can adapt to anything” with no specific structural requirements.
- **Red flag:** Candidate is uncomfortable advocating for clinical or physical limits; describes a history of pushing through fatigue.

Prompt 3 (Optional) — Cultural Calibration

OPTIONAL VETTING PROMPT

“Describe a time at a previous practice where you disagreed with how a case was being presented to a patient, or where you felt clinical priorities conflicted with production targets. How did you handle it?”

This single question is the most reliable filter for cultural fit between a candidate and a private, owner-operated practice. Candidates from production-heavy DSO environments often have substantive answers about conflicts they encountered. How they describe handling those conflicts is highly predictive of how they will behave in your office.

Ready to Solve Your Hiring Gap? Let's Talk.

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SOURCES & FURTHER READING

Citations supporting this guide

Every statistic, regulation, and benchmark cited in this document is sourced from a primary authority — federal agencies (HRSA, NHSC, CMS), peer-reviewed journals, industry associations (AAFP, AMA, ADA, ADHA, APA, NACHC, MGMA, AAPPR), or named research reports. Links below allow you to verify any claim directly.

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2. DentistryIQ — What 7,900 Dental Professionals Revealed in the State of Work Report
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3. ADHA — Position Statement on Dental Hygiene Workforce Solutions (April 2026: workload 65.7%, autonomy 62%)
https://www.adha.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/PS_Updated_Dental_Hygiene_Workforce_Wolutions_2026-04-30.pdf
4. Becker's Dental — Over Half of Dental Professionals Dealing with Burnout (2026 Report summary)
<https://www.beckersdental.com/staffing-issues/over-half-of-dental-professionals-dealing-with-burnout-report/>
5. Dental Economics — Practice Production, Prioritized: How Good Is Your Case Acceptance, Really? (Roger Levin DDS)
<https://www.dentaleconomics.com/practice/article/14286823/practice-production-prioritized-how-good-is-your-case-acceptance-really>
6. Dentistry IQ — July Data Bite: National Average for Case Acceptance (61% conversion)
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7. Dental Intelligence — Best Practices to Improve Your Dental Case Acceptance Rate (20–50% range)
<https://www.dentalintel.com/blog-posts/best-practices-to-improve-your-dental-case-acceptance-rate>
8. ADA HPI — Dental Hygienist Shortage (60% adequate staffing; 91% recruiting challenging)
<https://www.ada.org/resources/research/health-policy-institute/dentist-workforce/dental-hygienist-shortage>
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10. Resonate — Integration Software Adoption in Dentistry Statistics
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