



How to be a Happy Hygienist

Simple Tips to Enjoy Every Day at Work

hygienist modern

Hu-Friedy

How the best perform

CONTRIBUTORS

► Rachel Wall, RDH



Rachel is a nationally recognized dental hygiene instructor, author, speaker and consultant. In 2013, Rachel was named one of *Dental Products Report's* Top 25 Women in Dentistry. Through her company, Inspired Hygiene, Rachel and her team provide private in-office coaching, a free weekly e-zine, the Hygiene Profits Mastermind group and the Profitable Perio Online Bootcamp. You can contact Rachel at rw@inspiredhygiene.com.

► Liz Miller, RDH



Liz Miller is an independent dental hygienist and owner of Healthy Smiles Shine, LLC, in Parker, CO. Liz stays engaged in her work by following her passion: “I am passionate about helping people work back into regular care. I enjoy reaching out to those who have taken a break from regular care and see myself as a “bridge” for them. Our business motto is “work hard with passion, follow the Golden Rule and love God’s people!” When you can do those three things, to me, that is a fun day at work!”

► Sherry Burns, RDH, MS



Sherry Burns, RDH, MS, is the originator of the design concepts for the “After Five Currettes” and the “Pen Probe,” and contributed to the design of the Gracey 17/18 and the Swivel Ultrasonic Insert. She’s also the developer of the “It’s About Time” sharpening technique.

Burns has maintained close teaching relationships with dental professionals throughout North America and Japan for 25 years and authored a Japanese text, *All Aboard the Perio Express*, published in 2005. She has been included in *Dentistry Today's* Outstanding CE Clinicians for the past several years.

A Letter From Hu-Friedy

FOR MORE THAN 100 YEARS, Hu-Friedy has been delivering the highest quality dental products to help our customers perform at their best. One of the ways we do this is by listening to you — the dental hygienist. Your unique insights on clinical needs and challenges have helped shape countless product innovations through the years.

That’s why we were thrilled to partner with *Modern Hygienist* to learn more about you and your role in the dental practice, and what you value most about your job. We recognize the vital role you play in providing the very best dental care to patients and the challenges that come along with this.

We appreciate your candid and honest insights on what it means to be a dental hygienist. Thank you to the more than 1,200 dental hygienists who shared their opinions to help us develop this valuable resource. We hope you enjoy it and learn a little more about yourself and your peers.

All the best,

RON SASLOW
Chairman & CEO



How the best perform

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How do you define happiness?

When it comes to work, it's easy to measure things like compensation, time off and productivity. It's a lot harder to put a score on happiness. But no matter what we talk about when we talk about our career goals and job satisfaction, what we're really talking about... is happiness.

Pharrell Williams sings about it, book stores are packed with books about it, the Declaration of Independence name-checks it, and the grand daddy of all big thinkers, Aristotle, called happiness "the chief good, the thing toward which all other things aim."

We all want to be happy.

That's why *Modern Hygienist* partnered with Hu-Friedy to create the Happy Hygienist Campaign: To help foster more Happy Hygienists. In 2014, we conducted a comprehensive study on career satisfaction among dental hygienists. We asked detailed questions about work relationships, office environments, patient care, schedules, instrument satisfaction and more. Close to 1,000 working dental hygienists provided us with deep insight into what matters when it comes to being happy at work.

While the answers themselves may not be surprising, what came to light was the consistency in responses. It doesn't matter whether you're the only hygienist in a rural solo practice, one of many in a large urban practice, or an independent hygienist with your own practice: The same things matter when it comes to being happy as a hygienist.

In this e-book, we will explore the results of that survey. More importantly, we will provide concrete tips to help you improve your career and be a happier hygienist. Why? As Colorado hygienist Liz Miller says, "More happy hygienists means more happy patients, and more happy patients mean more happy hygienists!"

ABOUT OUR HYGIENISTS

Here's the demographic breakdown of the hygienists who took our survey:

Length of practice

- 1 to 5 years:26%
- 5 to 10 years:16%
- 10 to 25 years:27%
- More than 25 years:31%

Number of practices:

- 1 practice:70%
- 2 practices:21%
- More than 2 practices:.....9%

How many dentists in practice?

- 1 dentist:50%
- 2 dentists:25%
- More than 2 dentists:.....25%

How many hygienists in practice?

- 1 hygienist:20%
- 2 hygienists:30%
- More than 2 hygienists:.....50%

The single most important component of job satisfaction for hygienists is not how well they are treated, but how well their patients are treated.

WHAT MAKES HYGIENISTS HAPPY?

We asked hygienists to rank the attributes that have the biggest impact on whether they love their jobs or not. Here's what they said:

- ▶ How well their coworkers treat their patients
- ▶ Quality of the instruments they work with
- ▶ Respect from the dentists they work with
- ▶ Overall practice environment
- ▶ Dentist's level of professionalism
- ▶ Dentist's relationships with patients
- ▶ Their relationship with their coworkers
- ▶ Their relationship with their dentist
- ▶ Autonomy in treating their patients
- ▶ Ability to set their own work schedule

What makes us happy?

The core elements that lead to happiness for dental hygienists are no different from what makes people happy in any job. According to a 2013 study of global employee engagement conducted by the international human resources consulting firm, Aon Hewitt, the most important factors in job satisfaction are:

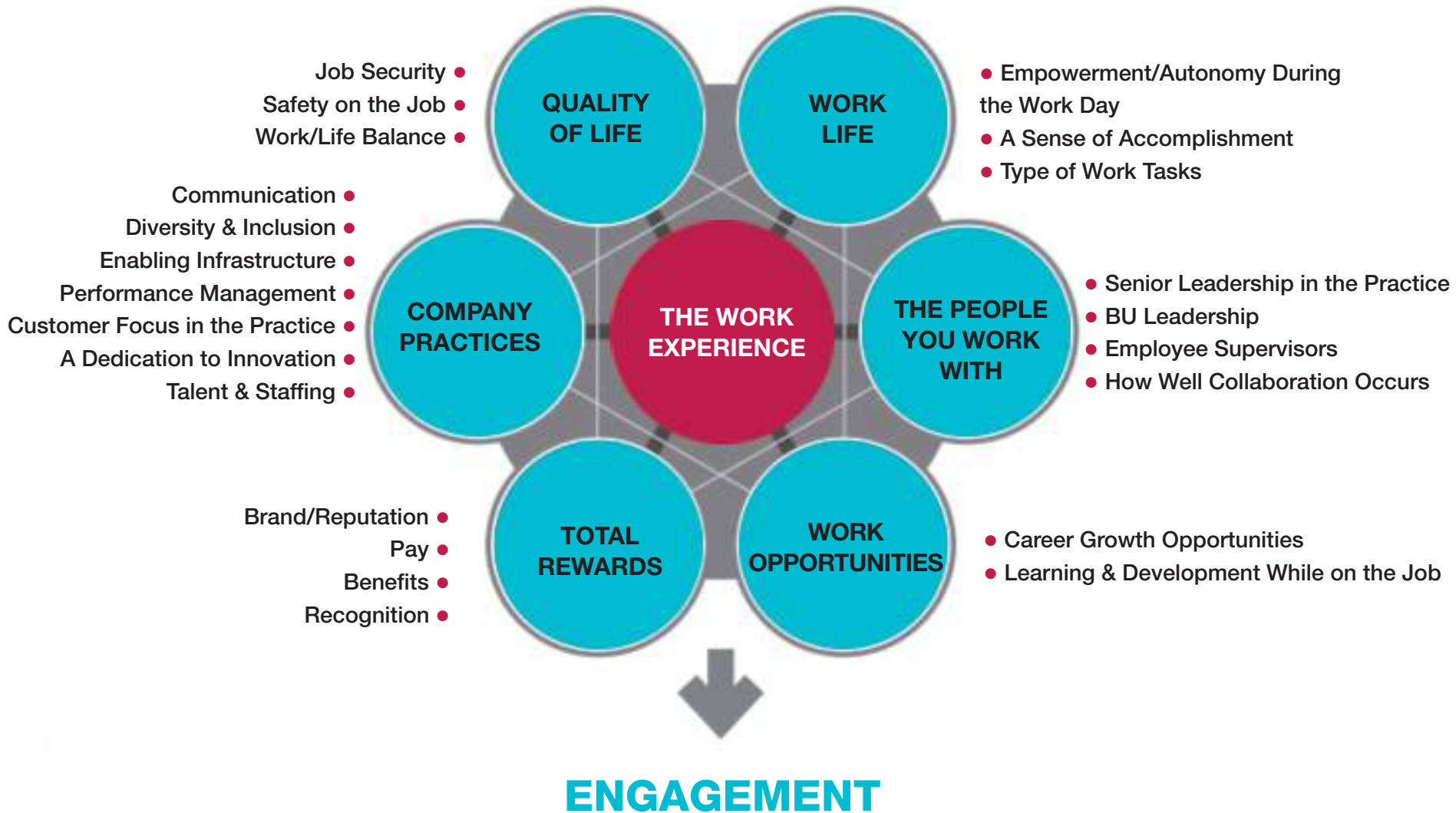
- **Positive relationships with employers and coworkers**
- **A pleasant work environment**
- **A sense of accomplishment and purpose**
- **Empowerment and autonomy**
- **Opportunities to improve your position**
- **Learning and development**

But there is one key difference that makes hygienists unique: The single most important component of job satisfaction for hygienists is not how well they are treated, but how well their patients are treated. The second most important component is the quality of the instruments you work with every day.

Beyond these key differences, happiness looks just about the same for all of us. We want to feel empowered and valued in what we do. We want to work in a pleasant, positive environment doing work we care about. We want to be part of something bigger than us. We want to be engaged.

Over the past 10 years, there has been an explosion in research on happiness, and when you read the literature, this word, "engagement," comes up a lot. It appears that being fully present, being in the flow of what we're doing, may just be the very definition of happiness.

Key components in job satisfaction based on the Happy Hygienist survey



50% of hygienists say they love their job.

38% like their job.

1% hate everything about it.

WHAT DOES ENGAGEMENT LOOK LIKE?

We asked our contributing hygienists what engagement looks like for them:

LIZ MILLER: “Having enough time to treat my patients the way I want them to be treated. If I’m feeling squeezed, then I’m worried; and if I’m worried, then it’s hard to be present.”

RACHEL WALL: “Caring for my patients physically and mentally ... knowing I’m doing a good job and being well recognized.”

How to love your job

According to our study, 48 percent of hygienists say they feel completely engaged in what they’re doing at work. Of the rest, 48 percent say they are mostly engaged, and the rest say they spend most of their time wishing they were somewhere else. This aligns pretty well with the 50 percent who say they love their job, 38 percent who like it, 11 percent who say they’re not crazy about it, and 1 percent who hate everything about it.

Our goal with this e-book and the Happy Hygienist Campaign overall is to help boost more of the hygienists who like their jobs into the “love their job” category and provide some tools that can help hygienists who don’t like their jobs at all to improve their situations.

In terms of how to make that jump, our contributors pointed to one aspect: Empowerment.

While many people believe empowerment comes from outside, our contributors agree there are steps hygiene professionals can take to gain a sense of empowerment in their practices — or find a new practice.

“It’s unfortunate that there are some situations out there where someone may be stuck,” Miller says. “If you’re in a rural area and you’re working for the only dentist in town, and the situation is just terrible, then there is, unfortunately, only so much you can do to change things. But you have to try, and you have to have the tools to do it.”

To get there, Sherry Burns, RDH, MS, says you have to “challenge yourself to determine what it takes to make YOU a happy hygienist.”

STEP ONE

Ask for what you want

According to our survey, the quality of your professional instruments and equipment comprise the second most important factor determining how much you like your job. Why? Because no matter how well everything else is aligned, it's impossible to feel engaged in what you're doing if you're fighting with a dull or unsuitable instruments.

Of course, no hygienist would choose to work with poor equipment; so why is this a problem?

“Because a lot of hygienists don't choose the instruments they use,” says hygienist, consultant and educator Rachel Wall, RDH.

According to our survey, only 45 percent of hygienists get to fully decide which brand of instruments they use. One out of every four hygienists has little (19%) or no (7%) say in the instruments they use on a daily basis. When asked how strongly this factor influences their daily happiness, 92 percent said it is extremely important.

But here's where it gets really bad: Only 30 percent of hygienists rate the quality of their instruments as great, and 23 percent say the quality is good; 23 percent of hygienists say the quality of their instruments is poor or terrible. Remember this was the second most powerful component that can make or break a hygienists day, and you can see where there is room for improvement. After consulting with dozens of dental practices around the United States, Wall says she sees this problem a lot. But she also says it often has a simple solution.

Ask for what you NEED versus want. Need implies necessary to achieve the best clinical results.

This can also be an opportunity to learn new techniques and methods to combat unhappiness when it comes to instrumentation.

“The old saying of ‘Knowledge is Power’ is as relevant today as ever,” says Burns. “As much as the manufacturing of dental instruments has evolved and progressed over the years, some approaches and techniques continue to play a significant role in the daily practice of our profession.” For example, the maintenance of sharp cutting edges. “There is no magic innovation out there that totally eliminates our ethical responsibility of assessing the condition of our instruments prior to each and every use.”

Wall also encourages the practices she works with to establish a budget for hygiene products and let the hygiene team manage it. According to our survey, just 3 percent of hygienists manage their own budget — a figure 80 percent of hygienists say is very important in determining how happy they are.

2 STEP TWO

Act like a business partner

Liz Miller, RDH, has not choice but TO think like a business partner; she is the business. Miller lives in Colorado, one of the few states that allows dental hygienists to operate independently of dentists. So after 18 years in dental hygiene, in January 2014, Miller set out on her own.

Through her practice, Healthy Smiles Shine, Miller splits her time between her Parker, CO., facility and traveling to treat clients in their homes, businesses, nursing homes, or wherever people need what Miller calls a “bridge” to regular oral health care.

“I want to provide the care I want to provide, treat people the way I want them to be treated, and determine the course of my own future,” Miller says.

Miller says this entrepreneurial spirit and the desire to “treat our people well” can be a driving force for hygienists whether they are independent or work as part of a team in a dental practice.

WANT MORE MONEY? TAKE MORE RISK.

Here's how Wall recommends preparing to ask for change in compensation:

- 1.** Schedule a conversation with the dentist to discuss how you can contribute more to the practice and earn more as a result.
- 2.** Begin the conversation by discussing concrete improvements you have made: What new procedures have you added? What new learning have you brought to the team? How have you added new patients to the practice?
- 3.** Inform the dentist that you would like to shift your compensation so that more of your income can be based on bonuses for hitting specific metrics in the future. Be willing to take a lower base or hourly rate in return.
- 4.** Agree upon the metrics that will be used to determine the bonuses.
- 5.** Start measuring now. Wall recommends having 12 months of data before discussing a change in compensation methods.

If, like the majority of our survey respondents, you want more say in your treatment planning or the equipment, instruments and technology you use, then the best way to get there is to link your success to your practice's success by thinking like a business partner.

“The most successful hygienists I know are those who move the conversation from their personal attitudes and opinions to what's good for the patient, the team and the practice,” Wall says. “Instead of talking about what you want, start talking in terms of standards, expectations, goals and systems. Show the doctor you care about the success of the practice, that you can increase productivity and bring in new patients, and you will find you have a lot more say than you think you do.”

Want a concrete way to make a difference in your practice? “Ask to learn more about what the doctor is learning,” Wall says. “Learn what new techniques, treatments or technology the dentist is introducing to the practice so you can talk to your patients about it.

“It's all about being part of the practice family,” Wall says.

How to make more money

Compensation is another component that can be transformed by a partner mindset, Wall says.

“Employees focus on security, and they are willing to accept what the business owner pays them in exchange for that security,” Wall says. “Business partners accept risk in exchange for greater profits. If you want to make more money, then show that you are willing to take risks.”

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STEP THREE

Champion success for your team

After patient care and instrument quality, relationships are the most important driver of hygienists' happiness — or lack of it. Ninety-two percent of hygienists said the level of respect they receive from the dentist is very important to their level of happiness, with 82 percent saying the level of respect is good, very good or great.

But while having the dentist's respect is crucial, our survey shows hygienists don't have to be BFFs with dentists; just 67 percent said camaraderie with the dentist was very important to their happiness.

Relationships with coworkers are a different story. Here, 83 percent of hygienists said their working relationships were very important to their happiness, and 82 percent cited professionalism to each other as key. Overall, relationships with dentists and coworkers were reported as positive.

But if you're looking to move your working relationships from good to great, then there are definitely some steps you can take to get there.

Advocate for what your team members want — not just what you want. Encourage continuing education and arrange CE opportunities for the team. Contribute topics for discussion at the huddle. Build consensus instead of compromise when it comes to choosing equipment, and make sure every hygienist in the practice has the opportunity to use the best.

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STEP FOUR

Communicate

Of course, communication is key to any healthy relationship, especially when it comes to conflict. And our study shows hygienists may not be the best at dealing with conflict in the practice.

Less than half of the hygienists we surveyed said they deal with a conflict with a colleague by discussing the matter directly. Twenty-one percent just keep it to themselves, 15 percent talk about it with other coworkers, 12 percent discuss it with the office manager and 8 percent go to the dentist.

Leadership author and advisor Mike Myatt encourages anyone seeking to improve their conflict resolution skills to focus on three things:

- ▶ **Deal with conflict head on:** “If a conflict does flair up, you can likely minimize its severity by dealing with it quickly. Time spent identifying and understanding natural tensions will help avoid unnecessary conflict.”
- ▶ **Understand the WIIFM Factor:** “Understanding the other professional’s what’s-in-it-for-me position is critical. If you approach conflict from the perspective of taking the action that will help others best achieve their goals, you will find few obstacles.”
- ▶ **Pick your battles:** “If the issue is important enough to create a conflict then it is surely important enough to resolve. If the issue, circumstance, or situation is important enough, and there is enough at stake, people will do what is necessary to open lines of communication and close positional and/or philosophical gaps.”

STEP FIVE

Keep learning

Continuing education, whether formal or informal, is one of the surest ways to remain engaged in your work. And by that measure, hygienists are certainly an engaged bunch. In our study, 49 percent of hygienists said they love to learn and regularly seek out new opportunities to learn and 27 percent said they take more continuing education than they have to. Less than a quarter of our hygienists said they take enough CE to fulfill their requirements.

“Opportunities for continuing dental hygiene education have evolved and greatly expanded over the past 20 years,” says Burns. “Study clubs, lectures/seminars, hands-on workshops, webinars, YouTube videos, and online chat rooms are just some of the many ways we have to keep up-to-date and increase our knowledge base on current issues and hot topics in our profession. In conversations with my colleagues around the country, three main areas of interest are: 1. New tips and trends in clinical techniques. 2. Advancements in new product development, designs, and technologies. 3. Impact of scientific research on clinical treatment.”

Educational opportunities abound in dental hygiene from national and regional events to local study clubs and college programs and courses offered by manufacturers like Hu-Friedy. Varying the type of education you pursue will keep you engaged and expose you new ideas and new colleagues.



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