

How Dental Assistants Can C.R.U.S.H. Their Careers in 2026

A Comprehensive Guide to Professional Excellence,
Leadership, and Career Growth

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**Courtesy of
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C

Continue Your Education Journey

Excellence in clinical and practice management

You've chosen a career path that rewards you emotionally through helping patients achieve optimal oral health. Speaking as a dental patient, I've seen firsthand how dental assistants impact patients every day—you're someone patients trust. That's not a role to take lightly.

So you're on the dental assisting career path. Now what's the next step? It's all about education.

Remember: You don't work in a dental practice—you work in a small business. Everyone must do everything they can to ensure the business grows and succeeds. That includes strengthening your clinical and practice management skills.

Action Steps:

- Read dental periodicals to learn about the latest news and techniques
- Talk to your sales reps about industry trends and exciting new products
- Visit www.DANB.org to explore career growth opportunities in your state
- Pursue certifications like CDA or EFDA to show your commitment
- Review state-by-state requirements to ensure you're doing everything you're legally allowed to do
- Find local courses and connect with fellow assistants through social media and events

Make the effort to be a leader. Ask questions that can further your career and make your practice better. Take the first step and continue your education journey today.



R

Relationships Win the Day

Building excellence with patients and colleagues

Relationships—whether at home or within the practice—can be tricky. We're all human with different priorities and pet peeves. This is where you can be the leader in your practice.

Don't fall into the trap of gossip. Impress people with your actions, not your words. Show everyone you're there to work and better the business. Yes, there's time for fun and laughter—as long as the needs of the business come first.

Trust me, your patients can tell when you're upset. They can tell when you're upset with each other. Do yourselves and your business a favor: Resolve any differences you have today.

Be the leader. Be the one who says, "We need to talk." It may be unpleasant at first, but it can help the healing process begin—for your patients' well-being and the bottom line of your business.

Building Patient Trust:

Patients see you as an equal, someone just like them. When the doctor leaves the room, they'll often turn to you and ask, "Do I really need this? What do you think?" This is where you must know your stuff and be confident in your knowledge.

Learn the terminology. Be the health professional you are. Don't stumble over your words. Does your practice have scripts so everyone is saying the same thing? Nothing is more detrimental to your business than mixed messages from your team.



U

Understand Your Role

Know what you can legally do to improve the business

Know your place—not in a demeaning way, but in understanding your role in the practice and the flowchart of various procedures.

Go to www.DANB.org and research what you legally can or can't do in your practice. Make a note of it and never stray from it. Don't take a chance with your career and your patients' health.

So many dental assistants don't know what they can or can't do in their state. Don't let this happen to you. Educate yourself on your state's laws—it's an investment of time that will repay itself over and over again.

Expanding Your Value:

Once you know what you can do, make your own plan for incorporating those procedures into your practice. This is a golden opportunity to advance your career and prove how invested you are in the practice's success.

How do you bring up adding services? Start with a conversation focused on the bottom line. When the business does well, everyone wins. Technology is becoming a bigger part of the dental industry every day—know your state's requirements and create a roadmap for the skills you need.

Talk to other assistants in your area about what they're doing in their practice. Learn from others—both the good and the bad. Learn their secrets to success and the mistakes they made so you can avoid them.



S

Start with Your Attitude

Be a leader, not just another team member

Attitude is everything. If your attitude isn't where it should be, your patients know it. When patients don't feel comfortable in the practice, they find somewhere else. Your business suffers.

If your attitude isn't where it should be, figure out today what it would take to get it there. If it's something at the practice, resolve it today. It may take a tough conversation, but it's worth it.

Never say you're "just" a dental assistant. You're THE dental assistant. You're THE rock star of the practice.

Part of being a leader means sometimes making bold moves—starting tough conversations or proposing new ideas. No one should be able to ruin your day, week, or month. If someone is, put a stop to it today.

Transform Your Mindset:

If you don't believe in yourself, who will? Put aside any negative thoughts about your position. Don't minimize the role you play with your patients and in the success of the business.

When you change your outlook on who you are and what you mean to the bottom line, everything changes. People notice the change—and it's contagious. Don't be afraid to talk about what you want to accomplish and your goals for the future.

Having that kind of courage sets the table for harnessing the true potential that lies inside each of you.



H

Harness Your Potential

Discover what you love and find your tribe

What do you really love to do in the practice? Oral surgery? Impressions? Working with seniors, children, or orthodontic patients? Do you know what you love? Does your doctor know?

Talking about your passions reinforces that you aren't just collecting a paycheck—you're wanting the practice to grow and succeed. You're also wanting to grow your career. That speaks volumes to who you are.

Think about what you love to do. Then think about how you could do more of it. Then talk to your team about devising a plan where more could be done in the practice—benefiting both you and the bottom line.

Stretch Your Boundaries:

This may sound outside your comfort zone, but the only way you're going to grow is to stretch your boundaries. Otherwise, you're doing the same thing the same way every day. Does that sound like a fun career?

Find Your Tribe:

- Attend local or state dental meetings and meet other assistants
- Find an idea partner nearby to bounce thoughts and plans off of
- Join Facebook groups for dental assistants
- Connect with the American Dental Assistants Association and Dental Assisting National Board
- Explore your state's dental assistants association

Your tribe is waiting for you. Go find them.

Gather your courage. Stretch your boundaries. Go crush it.

