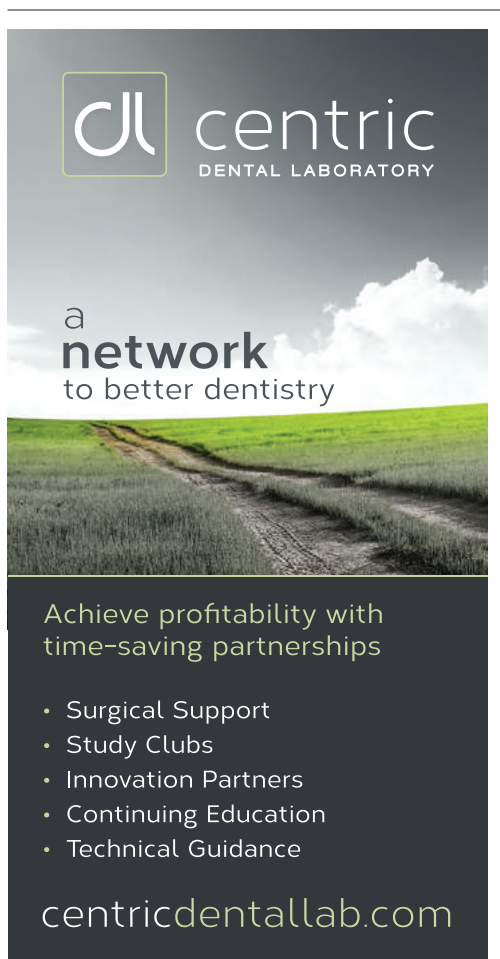


TOP TIPS Dental Labs Want You to Know

Professionals from **three top-notch labs** offer their best advice to new dentists.

When patients come to your office for restorative treatment, your intention is to meet all their expectations by providing quality, esthetic and well-fitting restoratives along with a great patient experience.



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Of course, on occasion, complications can arise that make meeting expectations a challenge. Working with an established and experienced lab that can provide good case planning support can be a great comfort to dentists. A collaborative lab relationship can help you avoid unanticipated chair time that costs you money and inconveniences your patients.

While it's easy to put all the blame on the lab, the quality of work the lab can provide is dependent on what information and materials they have been provided. There are steps you can take to help ensure you receive consistent high-quality restorations that make you, your patients and the lab happy.

The New Dentist™ magazine recently spoke with owners and clinical professionals from three dental labs about common challenges they see and what new dentists can do to help their lab provide better results. Here are their tips:

Take accurate impressions.

This is a challenge labs encounter every day. James Forgeng, CDT, who

heads the ceramic side of Interchrome Dental Lab's fixed department, said getting the accurate impressions required to produce a high-quality restoration, along with all the other pertinent information, is one of their biggest struggles. The key to a great impression lies in following impression material guidelines and knowing the specific impression techniques for different restoratives. A quality lab can help with this.

Dr. William Roe, DMD, who founded Tuscaloosa Dental Arts so he could blend the clinical aspect with the lab, also sees this as a challenge.

"Dentists ask us to produce a high-quality restoration but they don't give us the impression and bite registration we need to actually do that," Dr. Roe said. "I've had dentists give me horse-shoe shaped impressions of the upper arch for a denture, or barely use enough material to fill the tray when taking an impression for a full-arch implant restoration. If you're a little more particular on the front end, it will save you a lot of time at delivery."



Give labs everything they request.

This includes bite registrations, diagnostic wax-ups, temporary models, and desired tooth color, for example. If you don't send the lab what they need, their technicians are impeded from starting the case or are left in a position to take a "best guess." That makes it difficult to give you a predictable result.

Many dentists tend to skip some of these items because they think it will save them money. Maybe at first, but it actually ends up costing more, said Eddi von Schlichting, CDT, and Interchrome co-founder who heads up the removable department. Why? There's a good chance they'll need to redo the entire case, costing money as well as time.

"We do a lot of big esthetic cases and instead of giving us a model, the dentist often just writes 'make it ideal' on the script," Forgeng said. "No one knows what that means. It's like telling a builder to build the ideal house. A lot of times we're missing the architectural plan of what we need to get a consistent result."

Go back to basics. For example, don't take an impression in a pool of

blood and expect it to fit, Dr. Roe said. Isolate the tooth and keep it dry. Getting the fundamentals correct will get you the best results.

Communicate. While it's vital to provide your lab with all the pertinent information, sending the lab script and materials isn't enough. Take the time to call the lab to go over the case and ask questions. As a new dentist, you're still learning, and your lab can be a wealth of information.

"A lot of dentists fail to realize how many different things come to the dental lab case wise," Dr. Roe said. "So when they get into something difficult they're afraid to call and ask 'hey have you seen this before' or what do you think about this.' Dentists really need to look at their lab as a partner versus just a vendor."

And when a lab calls you, always call them back, said Dr. David Allen, Clinical and Quality Control Advisor at Centric Dental Lab. The lab can't move forward on the case until questions are answered, so not returning calls because you get busy or forget will only cause delays.

Focus on education. There's a lot they didn't teach you in dental school, and restorative materials and techniques are constantly evolving. Taking CE classes and joining study clubs can help fill those gaps, said Benni von Schlichting, CDT, and Interchrome co-founder who heads up the digital side of the fixed department. Keep your lab up to date with what you are learning, as your lab should do with you, so you are always on the same page.

One of the areas von Schlichting and Forgeng suggest dentists focus on is photography. Images can be a huge help to labs, but only if they're taken properly. Learn how to capture images that give labs important information, such as smile line, lip height and buccal corridor. Remember to always

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include a shade reference and name photos clearly.

No matter what courses you take, it's important to be a life-long learner, Dr. Roe said. Seek out classes that go beyond the bare minimum at respected organizations like The Pankey Institute, The Dawson Academy and Spear Education.

Find a mentor. As you begin your career, it's important to have mentors to guide you. Experienced dentists are great mentors, as are dental lab technicians, Dr. Allen said. Build a relationship with your lab and turn to them when you need advice, whether you have questions about a case you've never seen before or aren't sure what material is best for a certain situation.

"Don't be embarrassed of what you don't know," Dr. Allen said. "You have to admit it to yourself first and then

you have to admit it to the patient—and that's OK. They don't expect you to know everything, and they can tell when you're not telling the truth. Tell them you don't know but you'll find the answer."

Mentors can help you find those answers, and that includes your dental lab.

Visit your lab. Many dentists don't really know what actually goes into producing a high-quality restoration or why it can take so long, Dr. Allen said. Before hiring a lab, interview them about their procedures and then set up a time for a tour. This will help you understand the process and appreciate what happens once a case leaves your office.

"Rushing cases on a consistent basis puts a strain on resources and may end up in errors or inconsistencies," said Lisa von Schlichting, Interchrome office manager and co-founder. "If the lab and the doctor agree on a turnaround schedule the clinical staff always knows how long to schedule out a case. If true rush cases come up due to emergencies, the lab is more easily able to handle those because the day to day is scheduled with the required time."

Choose a quality lab. When you are seeking out a lab, take the time to meet with ownership and key technical members to clarify and set expectations. Listen and ask questions about the materials they use and why, the protocols they use to achieve predictable results, and what education, support and value added services are available to you. Not all labs are equipped to offer the same level of support. Finding the right fit for your practice is key to a successful relationship.

Be accountable. If you delegate duties, such as impression taking, to team members, it's important to evaluate their work before you send it off to the lab, Dr. Allen said. Hold team members accountable and have them

retake impressions or digital images if they aren't up to your standards.

Invest in quality materials.

Instead of focusing on saving money, Dr. Roe suggests purchasing the best materials possible. While it might cost you more up front, it will save you money in the long run. Why? You won't have as many issues with the material or need as many remakes. If you're not sure which material is best for a particular case, consult your lab.

Do your research. Not all labs are created equal, and it's important to find one that can create the high-quality restorations your patients deserve. Remember, the focus should be on value rather than cost, Forging said.

"Work with a lab that cares about the product and that follows up, not one that just puts the restoration in a box and is never heard from again," Dr. Roe said. "The biggest thing is looking for a lab that will help you grow your practice and that makes your work chairside easier. Develop relationships and become a partner with your lab. If your dental practice succeeds, they are going to succeed."

Have a plan. When treating a complex case, involve your lab in the process, just like you would any specialty doctor, Dr. Roe said. This will ensure everyone is on the same page and that you're able to provide the final treatment the patient is expecting.

Bottom line: Communicating with your lab and providing them with the information they need is key to delivering your patients the best care possible. Think of the lab as your partner and a resource and it will lead to better patient outcomes.

"In general, the dentists who get the best results are the ones we have an open dialogue with and a good relationship with," Benni von Schlichting said. "Having an open dialogue and forming a relationship with your lab is huge. It leads to more money in your pocket." **TND**



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