Orthodontics offers a multitude of career opportunities, and all can be personally and professionally rewarding. Orthodontics can put you on a career path that provides the satisfaction of helping patients improve their smiles, dental health and self-esteem. It’s a positive, upbeat career that lets you deal with generally healthy, motivated people who are on the road to better lives. Your work contributes to new smiles for children, teens and adults who can confidently meet the world face-first.

It takes a team

The team leader is the orthodontist. But today’s successful orthodontic practices utilize a variety of skilled staff members:

- Clinical Coordinator
- Financial Administrator
- Instrument Coordinator
- Marketing/Social Media Coordinator
- Office Administrator
- Orthodontic Chairside Assistant
- Orthodontic Laboratory Technician
- Scheduling Coordinator
- Treatment Coordinator

What does it take to join the team?

Becoming a member of the orthodontic team requires a unique combination of skills, a commitment to excellent patient care and a desire to excel. For some positions, an interest in health science is important, and dental assisting experience or certification may be preferred. For others, general business skills are needed. Following are examples of orthodontic staff positions, their typical responsibilities, and skills needed for success.

Orthodontists receive an additional two to three years of specialized education beyond dental school to learn the proper way to align and straighten teeth. Only those who successfully complete this formal education may call themselves “orthodontists,” and only orthodontists can be members of the American Association of Orthodontists.
What is orthodontics?
Orthodontics is a specialty area of dentistry concerning the diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of dental and facial irregularities such as crooked teeth or misaligned jaws. Children, teenagers, and adults can benefit from orthodontic treatment. The goal of care is to create a healthy “bite,” optimizing the alignment of teeth within the jaws to enable good function (biting, chewing, speaking). When an individual has a healthy bite, their teeth also tend to have a pleasing appearance.

What is an orthodontist?
An orthodontist is a specialist in orthodontic treatment. “Specialist” means a doctor completed general education followed by additional years of study in their chosen specialty area. For orthodontists, this means graduating from dental school, and then two-to-three more academic years of studying orthodontics at an accredited orthodontic residency program. Only those who successfully complete this rigorous education may call themselves “orthodontists.” These experts have unique education, expertise, and experience in helping patients achieve healthy, beautiful smiles. Only orthodontists are admitted as members of the American Association of Orthodontists.

Orthodontic Staff Professions

Office Administrator
Performs administrative (clerical, bookkeeping) duties; schedules appointments; greets patients; reaches out on behalf of the doctor/practice to patients, family dentists, and other dental specialists or doctors; manages patient records; processes patient insurance and financial arrangements.

Requirements may include: customer service skills; strong oral and written communication skills; business training and/or experience; and computer skills (for patient record-keeping, patient and professional communications, billing and scheduling).

Orthodontic Chairside Assistant
Assists the orthodontist with treatment; prepares, maintains orthodontic instruments, supplies, and equipment; collects and records patient health histories; takes photos, x-rays, scans, impressions; educates patients about oral health and overall health; assists with the placement/removal of orthodontic appliances; instructs patients in appliance care. Orthodontic assistants also play key roles in motivating patients to take an active role in their treatment.

Requirements may include: customer service skills; excellent hand-eye coordination; and computer skills (for inputting patient records, computer imaging, etc.).

Treatment Coordinator
Serves as liaison between the orthodontist and new patients with the goal of helping those who consult the orthodontist commit to starting care. Creates positive experience for the potential new patient/patient family; explains recommended treatment plans; communicates fees for treatment; discusses the practice’s payment plans to help patients/parents understand the affordability of their care; determines insurance coverage/other benefits to help patients/parents minimize out-of-pocket expenditures; schedules appointments; follows up to answer any questions/concerns expressed by patients/parents who have had a consultation but have not committed to starting treatment.

Requirements may include: excellent communication and negotiating skills; positive attitude; good judgment and sound decision-making; basic math skills; computer skills; and sales experience.

Orthodontic staff development
The American Association of Orthodontists (AAO) recognizes and supports the professional development of those in orthodontic assisting and administrative roles. Programs include the Specialized Orthodontic Assistant® certification via the AAO Voluntary Certification Program®, granted by AAO Services, Inc., online and in-person educational opportunities for orthodontic staff who are employed by AAO members, as well as an online orthodontic staff training program endorsed by the AAO.