

Earn Higher Profits from Effective Leadership

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The success of any practice is determined by many elements in that office, not the least of which is the leadership ability of the doctor. The importance of this role is often overlooked in the grind of daily business and management concerns; however, its impact cannot be stressed enough. Too often doctors judge their competence by how popular or busy they are. When competence is really determined by clearly defining what behavior and accomplishments they expect.

Your management style costs you hundreds of dollars each year. Investing in how well you handle the responsibility of being the boss can equal thousands in your pocket. As a boss most of you are probably doing a pretty good job, although you may be too self-sacrificing and permissive. However, most of you have not taught your team to share the load of the practice's success. Doctors should manage their practice, by spending more time with their team and empowering them to take responsibility for their own actions. Ironically, the most successful leaders are supportive and do not become overbearing. The doctor's job is to create the environment for success and the team members should put forth the effort. Too many doctors sacrifice themselves to their team.

The real process of leadership begins by looking for team members who are respectful, responsible, and resourceful. Most doctors hire whoever is available at the time and work toward instilling these qualities in them. Individuals who respect authority pay attention; team members who are given responsibility give to the practice; employees who are resourceful will become problem solvers or team players.

Your team counts! Every practice is going to have technology. It is leadership and management of the team that is the critical factor.

Surveys I have conducted with team members over the years continue to indicate that their doctors fail to inspire them to higher levels of performance. One team member said her doctor's idea of dealing with them was to find their weakness and use it for his own benefit. Another said that her doctor watched them like a hawk, noting every move they made. One practice said that morale was so low that the team decided to cancel the annual Christmas party so no one would have to socialize with their doctor. Comments like this illustrate how crippling a bad boss can be to morale and performance. Poor leadership translates into low employee morale, high turnover, absenteeism, and decreased productivity. Well-managed team members have a more positive attitude. They are extra cooperative and the most productive.

The ability to motivate team members is a key attribute of a good boss. A good boss creates an atmosphere that not only encourages people to grow, but puts the necessary tools there for people to use. Good bosses also provide vision and direction, and have expectations and goals. Leadership is an evolutionary process that is learned. The most effective skill a doctor can have in leading his/her team is being an effective communicator and a good listener. Employees can tell immediately if the doctor is truly interested in their development or only interested in their ability to produce.

Here are ways to put you on the fast - track to effective leadership:

- Hire only the best.

If you want motivated employees, hire them. If you have a team of self-starters, you won't waste time trying to inspire a group of half-hearted workers. Hire people who show they're self-motivated in their daily lives and find ways on their own to recharge.

- Make your expectations clear.

Share your vision with them. Pinpoint the results you are after. If your goal is to increase production or new patient flow, sit down with your team and define what you want and how to achieve these increases. Ask for their input, too. Employees are more likely to go out of their way to implement a plan they helped develop.

- Provide training.

Define the skills that are necessary for employees to do their job well. Schedule time to teach them yourself or have another member of the team do it. This also promotes cooperation and teamwork. Take advantage of continuing education offered by your local Dental Society or hire a professional to work with you one-on-one in your office. When team members finish a course, post their certificates in their operatories for patients to read. This kind of recognition gives them a good feeling. Also, the more skilled they are, the more they can do to justify their salary increase each year.

- Recognize good work.

See someone doing something right? Say so. It's especially helpful to point out good work in front of other team members. Other ways to reinforce good behavior include writing thank-you notes, posting letters of appreciation from patients, and simply saying "Good Job!"

- Reward success.

Reward team members for good work. The sooner you reward an achievement the stronger the re-enforcement. Be specific. Explain what made the job well done. Give rewards that people appreciate. Always reward team members for meeting goals. Whatever is offered has to be available to all, and has to mean something to them. Ask the team what award they would like. Then do what you can to provide it.

- Do not micro-manage.

Many doctors tend to over-manage, which can be demotivating. Free your team by giving them control over their own lives at work. Everybody starts a job wanting to do well. When people are treated like adults, they perform well. Give the team control over their own area of responsibility. They like the fact that nobody is really supervising them day to day.

- Keep yourself motivated.

Don't expect your team to stay upbeat if you're not. The best motivator is a positive attitude from the doctor.

Build what you love about practicing dentistry into your everyday work life. Take a few moments each day to pat yourself on the back for all you have accomplished. After all, the greatest motivator should be your own success. Be aware of the chatter around your office, if it sounds like, "There is just too much work in this place.", "That's not my job; let somebody else do it.", or "No one appreciates the work I do.", chances are you need a review of your management style. When the boss bungles the job he does, it will smother the team rather than empower them.

The right management style combined with systems that promote teamwork will allow you to influence the behavior of those around you and, therefore, your practice. In the most successful practices where the doctor actually loves to come to work, the doctor is accountable for the success of the practice. Success begins with excellent leadership. Excellent leadership attracts the best staff. The good news about accountability is that you can improve the situation by empowerment instead of control. Who would you prefer to work for, someone who motivates by example or dominates by control?

Larry M. Guzzardo who has co-authored two books, "Powerful Practice" and "Getting Things Done" conducts in-office practice management consultations exclusively for dentists to enhance trust, create organization, increase profits, and the development of patient relationships that last. Larry has presented numerous workshops including, "Winning Patient Acceptance," "Business Communication Systems," and "The Leadership Challenge." For more information call 800-782-5770.