

Leadership, Influence, and Motivation: Leave ‘em Alone to Do It Themselves

Larry M. Guzzardo

Allowing staff to encounter challenges on a regular basis accomplishes two important goals. First, it provides experience, both for the individual staff member and you. Staff members who are exposed to challenges and allowed to use their heads to respond to them become better at it. Doctors often choose to shelter their staff from all aspects of decision making, keeping them outside the loop when big decisions are made and bringing them back in only to tell them how the situation will be resolved without ever explaining how the decision was reached. These are the same Doctors who then wonder why their staff make so many “bad decisions” or don’t respond to situations the way you would.

Second, regular challenge stimulates the staff. Their personalities and approach to their work may vary, however, one quality everyone should share is a sense that their job is more than a simple task to get done. You ask a lot from your staff. You should want and should expect your staff to feel they are part of something bigger than themselves, something that makes a difference to patients.

Consider it a part of your job as the leader of the practice to create a stimulating and attractive workplace. The only way to attract and retain bright, energetic self-starters is to fashion an environment that will allow them to shine. Even the most motivated staff will resist an environment that prevents them from demonstrating the very qualities that inspired you to hire them in the first place.

Work should be fulfilling and fun, an adventure. The need to create that sense of adventure is even more critical when managing staff who can’t be compensated in great amounts. Alongside excitement and fun there is something that goes a long way toward motivating: assign lots of responsibility. Staff members often think they are always right. To keep them interested is to continually challenge them. Make them prove they are as smart as they believe they are.

Offices with high morale are enormously productive and if you are not careful you can fall into a trap. Your staff is highly capable and if not sufficiently challenged, they can fall victim to low levels of satisfaction or arrogance, a sense that they “know better than you.” When performance deteriorates and staff starts to coast, they often do not realize they are no longer operating at the previous level. Thus, the need to push them to learn and master new things. It can be a very delicate balancing act. You want your staff to realize there is something special about working in your office and just because they are there they cannot rest on their laurels. Even though you are part of your practice, you too must feel that it exists for another purpose, not just for the satisfaction for those who work there. High morale is not an end, it is designed to create better performance. Your staff should feel that there is a kind of fulfillment from working in your office that they cannot find anywhere else.

Good people act from a combination of altruism and self-interest. The altruistic part comes from feeling you are helping other people, that your talents are being used to do good. There is exhilaration in doing something great for patients, something patients pay attention to and respect.

As a leader, you must not only set the direction for the office, but communicate the direction as well. You cannot just force your will on the staff just because you are the boss. You have to bring the staff on board, excite them about your vision, and earn their support. The staff then in turn will inspire those around them, and soon everyone will be focusing on the same goal; the accountability effort has to come from within each staff member.

Determining the right organizational structure starts with your mission. Then you have to identify your aim, and what you should do to achieve it; get the right people in the right job; and constantly follow up to make sure no one is drifting from the original purpose, that no other individual staff member has taken over or sidetracked the team. ■

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 to develop patient relationships that last. Larry has presented numerous workshops including, “[Winning Patient Acceptance](#),” “[Business Communication Systems](#),” and “[The Leadership Challenge](#).” Larry can be reached at 800-782-5770 or Larry@larrymguzzardo.com if you have further questions.