

“Step Aside to Offer Support”

Monitoring Progress Doesn't Mean Constant Looking-Over-the-Shoulder Meddling

By Larry M. Guzzardo

Assigning responsibility has become the new model for dental practice leadership, which is giving up its command-and-control structure and its directive style of management and replacing it with leadership by direction, staff involvement, and empowerment.

Assigning responsibility to each member of the team on your staff is an important part of the structure of your practice. It's the design through which tasks are completed. Developing high performance teams is a repeatable process, and there are critical elements that must be employed for your team to achieve and sustain high performance.

The **first** critical element is team member selection and support. The doctor becomes the team leader and the staff defers final decision making as well as accountability to him/her too.

To achieve the highest performance in a team requires that decision and accountability rests with the team. The doctor needs to be at the front end and then move to the side of the team to provide support. The doctor's role is to define the objectives for the team, assign responsibility, set goals, and assemble the staff and budget.

Once the staff is established, the doctor keeps abreast of the team's progress and helps out when someone needs it. The idea of a staff member reporting results to the doctor may seem to run counter to the notion of empowerment. It is not. Staff members that are given an objective but never asked how they are doing begin to feel unnecessary and unimportant, often leaving the practice.

The doctor needs to walk a fine line between monitoring progress and meddling in the daily operations of the team.

The **second** critical component for having a high performance staff is that the doctor must be a leader.

The **third** and final component is that staff members need to be accountable to each other for the team's result. Job descriptions must include goals as an indicator of performance.

Staff members need to provide open and supportive feedback - everyday. If you are wondering why the staff does not behave in ways that do not support the practice and accountability, look no further than how they are rewarded and recognized.

Building a high-performance staff involves time and effort. Its success depends on careful selection of its members, and highly focused training. Practices that make this investment will benefit through more participation, less stress, and higher productivity. ■

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