



Staff Development

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One of the areas in which a dentist feels least qualified is “staff development.” By staff development, I do not mean simply selecting a talented new staff member, hiring them, and paying them a good wage. That, by itself, is not enough. The first stage of staff development involves “acceptance” of the new staff member by his or her manager, patients and other staff. The next stage involves imparting knowledge about the job and how it is done technically and behaviorally.

Imparting Knowledge and Assigning Tasks—Some Pointers:

When teaching someone, start with the basics. Assume nothing. Explain in clear, simple language exactly what the job is and how it is to be done. You are setting up your expectations.

The easiest way to lead is to give orders, make demands and threaten punish-

ment. However, this way creates an unsettling atmosphere that is not conducive to a cooperative, self-motivated staff. Make requests.

Seek to identify the unique strengths and talent of each staff member. Develop job descriptions and delegate tasks that amplify their strength and minimize their non-strength. People tend to grow more from focusing on success and strength than on non-strength and failure.

Assume no staff member intentionally does something wrong. Do not be dogmatic or negative when you point out mistakes. Help them correct the error and show them how to avoid making the same mistake again.

Treat each staff member with respect. Their time may be less valuable to your business, but their worth as an individual is equal to yours.

The words “please” and “thank you” can make a staff member feel much better about working for you. It is an easy way to say what they do is important and appreciated. Learn to recognize positive behaviors “on the fly.”

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Do not give the hard, unpleasant jobs to the same staff members time after time. The entire team should share such tasks.

When a staff member asks you a question, give them an answer, and explain how you got the answer so the next time they can figure it out for themselves.

What Is a Leader?

A leader is willing and able to influence behavior, both their own and others. “Willing and able” have to do with commitment and motivation. Develop your ability to influence your team members. To create an environment within your office, where patients receive the best care, requires a staff that can work effectively and efficiently—and is motivated to do so. To be motivated, staff members must: feel good about themselves, feel what they are doing is important, feel respected by their dentist/manager, feel they are being treated equal to others, and get to do what they do best every day.

Feeling Good About Self

You are a leader and manager, not a therapist, but your attitude toward your team will have a positive effect in this regard. Staff members who take pride in their skills and teamwork will invariably produce quality work and take great pleasure in it.

Feeling Good About the Task

Keep in mind that every task, no matter how small, is necessary to create an experience that is best for the patient and all members of the team. Communicate that individual tasks are important, and match them to your staff’s individual talents.

Feeling Respect

Take time to listen. If you are called upon to solve a problem, it is better to prompt staff members to propose a solution to you first and, if it is an acceptable solution, let them do it their way. There are often several ways to solve a problem. If you have a way that is more appropriate than theirs, explain why. You want to avoid two situations: (1) your staff expects you to solve all problems and waits for you to



do it, and (2) they jump to a solution, which is not acceptable to you. Certain types of circumstances will occur over and over again. As your staff learns the acceptable solutions, they should feel confident and responsible to pursue them.

Directions should be given in terms of the job, not the individual. For example, you shouldn't say, "I told you five minutes ago to seat the next patient." Instead, you should say, "We need that patient seated right away so we can complete treatment." Staff members like to feel their dentist/manager cares about them and is concerned about what they think and how they feel. Convey this through your words and actions.

Feeling Equally Treated

Don't show favoritism when assigning tasks, creating one-on-one time, developing skills within your office, or providing continuing education. Make every effort to treat all staff members fairly, and take time to impartially deal with any complaints that might arise on an individual basis.

Goals Motivate

Goals are excellent motivational tools. When assigning a task, specify an amount of time for its completion. Define who, what, where, when and why of a task. Doing so will help you: determine how fast work is getting done, maintain workplace energy and enthusiasm, and over time seek more efficient, effective and "affective" ways to accomplish a task. (Remember, when Pankey dentists set goals, their objective isn't just to get things done but to get them done with resulting positive feelings.) I recommend you develop three sets of goals:

- **Task Goals** to be accomplished over a two to four hour period.
- **Daily Goals** to be accomplished that day and discussed in the "morning huddle."
- **Project Goals** that are long term with a timeline of weeks or months.



Staff members should learn to set their daily goals. In concert with their dentist/manager and other team members, individual goals are refined and facilitated. A synergy occurs over time that allows the team to work more efficiently and effectively.

Compensation

A staff member's value to the business and compensation package should correspond with ability to accomplish quality, predictable work that is valued by patients. If the business is more profitable by the staff member's efforts, this should be reflected in the compensation package. Organizing your business to benchmark and track results in a motivating system in itself.

Practice Goals

I have identified seven broad goals for the dental practice:

- To produce high-quality dentistry.
- To provide an enjoyable work environment.

- To provide income for staff and the dentist/manager, and at the same time, create a profit.
- To develop the skills and abilities of each staff member and doctor.
- To create camaraderie among the staff members.
- To help the patient attain Optimal Oral Health.
- To reach for the best, to be "outstanding" in each area of service.

It's great to have a team working together, doing high-quality work and developing high-quality relationships with themselves and patients. The team feels good about their efforts, themselves and the practice of which they are a part. This creates a desire to continually improve themselves and the practice because they receive feedback and are fairly compensated for their work and the growth they engender in the practice.

Developing a great place to work requires commitment to identifying talented staff members and developing them to encourage an individual rela-



tionship, define unique expectations and provide meaningful forms of personal recognition. With this simple formula, you will move your team from the Frosh-Soph to the Varsity. It's a fun trip.

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