



Become a Better Dental Practice Manager

By Roger P. Levin, DDS

Although owning a dental practice automatically makes you a team leader, the skills needed do *not* come automatically. You have to acquire leadership qualities and capabilities somehow and learn to use them successfully with your team.

Invest in Your Education as a Leader

There are numerous sources of leadership training. In addition to formal degree programs (which are impractical for most dentists), you can take advantage of seminars, online classes, articles, books and coaching. Look at these as CE opportunities, sharpening your business skills in the same way that you stay up to date in clinical areas.

Where Are You Leading Your Team?

As a leader, you have the primary responsibility of leading your team to do—what? Only you can figure that out. That means coming up with a vision for your practice, broad goals to serve as mileposts along the path to attaining that vision, and measurable performance targets for staff members to reach daily, weekly, monthly and annually.

Motivator in Chief

Using the practice vision, goals and targets, you need to inspire team members to meet and then exceed expectations. In staff meetings, interactions throughout the day and performance reviews, you should maintain steady, enthusiastic pressure on everyone (conspicuously including yourself) to excel. Dispense praise generously and, if you need to critique performance, do so with a positive, supportive and constructive attitude. And keep everyone well informed about how the practice is doing.

Lead by Example

The best leaders “model” desired behavior consistently so that everyone can see how it’s done. For example, if you want all team members to take every opportunity to improve patient satisfaction, do so yourself. If you want the staff to use power words (e.g., “amazing,” “fantastic”), show them how.

Keep Building the Value of the Practice

You may not plan to sell your practice any time soon, but you should always be on the lookout for ways to improve its value. The very same qualities that would command a higher price for your business are the ones that characterize a well-led team.

Delegate Almost Everything

Good leaders neither micromanage nor hover over their subordinates. They give them responsibilities and the resources (including training) needed to perform well.

Master the Art of Decision-Making

Most of the routine decisions made in your practice should be delegated to staff along with related responsibilities. With larger issues, ask, “*Will this take us toward the vision? Will it improve the quality of care we provide?*” And seek the advice of outside experts in areas you know little about.

Leadership is a subject you should study for the rest of your career. The rewards will be a better team, more personal satisfaction for you, and greater business success.