

Appraising Business Appraisals

Alexa Tagg, Sales Trainer at Denplan, looks into performance appraisals and how they can lead to the continuing success and growth of your business.

I think it's fair to say that most dentists running their own private practice recognise themselves not just as healthcare professionals but as small-business owners. Whether you leave the organisation of your business to a practice manager, or take a more hands-on approach, it's really important to ensure that your team feels motivated and happy.

An effective appraisal system can not only define the critical areas of each individual's role, but also help you set appropriate objectives for the benefit of both the team member and the practice as a whole. Undertaking regular, structured and pro-active appraisals, can also lead to a more loyal and motivated workforce, all working to make your practice successful long into the future. Below are a few ideas to help you get started.

All friends together

Most dental practices that I visit to provide bespoke training have a small team who are often friends as well as colleagues. So, it's easy to understand why principals and practice managers can sometimes feel a bit uncomfortable when it comes to appraisals...no one wants to set targets and give feedback to their friends! However, it's important to realise that just because people are friendly, doesn't mean they're 100% content in their role and it can be equally awkward for an employee to approach a principal with any concerns if they work in a close-knit team.

It's important therefore, that the whole appraisals process fits in with the culture of the practice and also has the commitment from top management. An effective appraisal system can be as informal as you want, but can really make all the difference in team moral and motivation. After all, you all want the same thing – high quality preventive dental care for your patients. So where can you start?

Best practice

It's a good idea to set aside sufficient time for appraisal meetings (at least one to two hours) and this should be held in a private room away from interruptions to maintain confidentiality. Carrying these out at suitable intervals also allows time for training to take place and objectives to be achieved. Most practices prefer an annual appraisal system, with regular follow-ups, possibly quarterly or as needed, depending on the individual. It's also a good idea to document what was said in each meeting, so you have something to refer back to at a later stage.

If you would like to link performance appraisals with key attributes and competencies, you could also include a grading or rating scale against each one and provide the support and training necessary so each individual is capable of achieving them. It's also good practice to allow for some self assessment and preparation from each team member before their appraisal meeting, as this will give them time to think about where they would like their role, training and development to go and what is needed for the continuing success of the practice.

You can also continually monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of your appraisal scheme to ensure that any issues which are raised are resolved. If you have not already got an appraisal system in place, or if you have tried it and not found it successful, I would recommend an appropriate training course to provide guidance on how to get the most out of the process, both for your own development and to gain the buy-in from your team. Some payment plan providers offer tailor-made training days, specifically designed around your practices' needs and can incorporate modules focused on Businesses Appraisals. Some of these courses can also count towards verifiable CPD when undertaken in accordance with GDC requirements.

Business first

It certainly is great to have a happy, stimulated and motivated workforce at your practice, but you really must ensure that your team is working towards the goals and best interests of the business as a whole. That's why it's important to add business-planning strategies into any appraisal system and for your team to understand the link between their personal goals and those of the practice.

Saying that, the main objective of an appraisal system has to be the development of your team's potential. Finding ways to support and enable this is vital and a great place to start is to ask your team members what it is that they want. This may sound obvious, but the appraisal processes should not be a top-down cascade; individuals should be given the opportunity to put forward their views and know that appropriate action will be taken on their behalf.

Rewards

It's really nice to give positive news and feedback at appraisal meetings, as this will really ensure that the individual goes away feeling good about their work and motivated for the future. Problems and praises should not be stored up to be dealt with at the appraisal meeting however, but should be dealt with as the situation arises. Also, try not to make appraisals just a way of discussing a person's pay-rise - financial rewards are secondary to performance if they are associated with this process at all.

It's clear to me that regular performance appraisal meetings can not only assist you in setting future targets for your team, but provide the kind of motivation that your practice needs to thrive long into the future.

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