

COACHING – A TEAM EFFORT

Lil Niddrie, Denplan Trainer, discusses how improving your coaching skills can help to increase both the performance of your business as well as the motivation of your practice team.

If you have ever wondered how to really fulfil your potential, not just at work, but in all areas of your life, then coaching could be the answer. You may even be a natural coach already. If you often find yourself listening to other people's problems, giving advice, or training others in new knowledge and skills, you may be implementing coaching principles in your day-to-day life without even realising it.

Even if the thought of coaching and teamwork makes your blood run cold, the tips below can help you learn how to improve your skills and make them an integral part of your practice's development.

So what do I need to know?

Life coaching and business coaching have increased steadily in popularity over the last decade, but for many smaller businesses, such as dental practices, professional business-coaching is simply too costly. However, by understanding the basic principles of coaching you can not only help your business, but also help yourself and other members of your team achieve their goals.

Coaching can also play an important part in improving your team's performance and motivation. By setting goals and supporting your colleagues as they work to achieve them, your practice will move forward and function much better. The idea is that ultimately, team members can learn to support each other, as they can all make the most of their individual skills.

Where do I start?

A useful place to start is by looking at how happy you are with the different areas of your life, such as work, finance, career, relationships and so on. By giving each area a mark out of ten,

or whatever measure you find easiest to work with, you can then see which areas of your life you may like to develop.

The next step is to identify your values. These can be values such as honesty and caring or they can be work specific, like teamwork and attention to detail. Once you are aware of people's values, you have the key to their motivation. Recognising different values within your practice can also give you an insight into any potential conflict. For example, one person's strongest value might be patient care while another's is the financial stability of the practice. Knowing this can help you assess whether practice decisions are based on a fair balance of the two.

Once you have identified values, the next step is to set goals. If you are helping one of your team to set their goals, ask simple, open, purposeful questions such as "What do you want to achieve?" and "How do you plan to achieve this?" It is also important to make sure that their values are well matched to their goals. For example, if someone has put "socialising with friends" as a value in their personal life, but they spend so much time working that they never see their friends, then they are going to struggle to achieve their goal.

Skills and limitations

The main obstacles to achieving goals are the limits of our skills and resources and the limitations of our minds. The issue of skills and resources can often be addressed by appropriate training or by asking for advice and support.

Some companies offer tailor-made training days, which are specific to your practice's needs and can even incorporate a module focused on the Principles of Coaching. Some of these courses can also count towards verifiable Continuing Professional Development (CPD) when undertaken in accordance with GDC requirements. This type of event provides an ideal opportunity for staff in similar roles to meet and learn together, and will benefit both your employees and your practice.

Limitations of the mind can be a little bit trickier! The challenge is to break out of unhelpful habits and negative thinking and believe that change is possible. Instead of righting things off because they are too much effort or you think they will be too difficult to achieve, why not give

things a try before you make your mind up. You might just surprise yourself and the sense of fulfilment when you reach your goals is worth the time and effort.

Never give up

All goals should be accompanied by a practical and realistic timeframe, and progress needs to be monitored. Set backs are inevitable, but it is important to see these as temporary. Take inspiration from inventor Thomas Edison who, when asked if he was discouraged after failing 10,000 times in his attempt to create the light bulb, replied: "Failed 10,000 times? I didn't fail 10,000 times. I simply learned 10,000 ways not to make a light bulb."

So why not give coaching a go? Learning how to identify your own and your teams' values and goals will not only improve communication and productivity at your practice, but will also give you a clear idea of where your practice is heading and the best ways of achieving your ambitions.

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