

THE KEY TO SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

Alexa Tagg, Denplan Sales Trainer, looks at how successful people management can not only improve working relationships and efficiency within the practice, but also improve staff retention and motivation.

The key to running a successful business is attracting, motivating and retaining the best people. Dentists and practice managers need to recognise that your most valuable asset is your team and, as business owners, you need to ensure that you hang onto your employees.

So how can you be certain you are managing your people effectively? By putting the following steps into place you can ensure you are getting the most benefit from your staff and, as a result, improve your business practices.

Involving employees

The employees in your practice are often uniquely positioned to see where improvements to working methods can be made or when patient demands are changing. You should therefore always aim to involve your staff wherever possible and use their detailed knowledge in the development of more efficient ways of working. This will not only improve the way your practice performs and create more efficient systems, but will also make your staff feel valued and gain their trust, commitment and buy-in when implementing changes in the future.

It is also vitally important to keep the channels of communication open with your team, particularly in these times of economic uncertainty. People are incredibly intuitive and by keeping worries or problems to yourself, you are increasing both your stress levels and the anxiety of your employees. By maintaining an open dialogue with your staff, they will feel more involved, valued and may even come up with solutions to a problem that you had not thought of.

Setting targets

In order to make your team feel motivated and challenged in their everyday working lives it is important to set them objectives and targets. You should have an idea of what you would like these to be, but ensure that you discuss them with each individual so that they can agree to them. Giving targets to employees without this communication can lead to them feeling overwhelmed and stressed. This can also create a reduction in productivity, time off due to stress-related illnesses and ultimately, a higher staff turnover. However, offering targets as a way of motivating your team can be great for your employees and your business.

It is important to remember that a good way of ensuring that targets or challenges are met is to offer some kind of incentive. This does not have to be financial, but some way of rewarding your team's achievements can really ensure they go the extra mile. Team days are great for rewarding the efforts of the whole group, but how about flowers, gift vouchers or an extra day's holiday for individual achievement? Small gestures can also go a long way such as Easter eggs at Easter, advent calendars at Christmas, or a gift on a milestone anniversary at the practice.

Rewards and benefits

In many cases, small businesses such as dental practices, find offering more comprehensive benefit packages unrealistic. There are, however, many ways of rewarding your employees for their hard work without too much financial draw. Simply by implementing working policies on issues such as equality and diversity or the environment, you are letting your staff know that you have an active interest in their working lives and surroundings. Be sure to communicate these to your team, however, and invite their input and ideas for other initiatives.

Some practices find it beneficial to make mutually rewarding deals with local businesses. You could offer the staff at the local opticians free registration in exchange for a free eye test for your team. This kind of arrangement can be extended to other business such as hairdressers and beauty therapists, but be sure to find out if your staff would actually use the benefit before making too many deals. This is a great way of finding cost-effective ways of rewarding your team, while also increasing your patient numbers.

Another way of rewarding your employees is to organise a team-day out of the office. Some payment plan providers organise a variety of practice team activities throughout the year, around the country, which both stimulate and educate. If you would prefer to organise your own however, remember that it does not have to be anything extravagant or expensive. Whether it is an afternoon bowling, a team lunch or a day at a theme park, getting to know your team better and showing them that they are appreciated can really pay dividends when it comes to motivation and productivity in the workplace.

Development and training

Setting targets and rewarding your team for their hard work are fantastic ways of developing your employees, but it is also important to offer training to really improve and develop their skills. There are innumerable courses for dentists to supplement their professional training, but what about your practice staff? Some payment plan providers offer a range of training courses for the whole practice team, including modules on customer care, practice marketing and people management.

Good people management should extend across all areas of your business. Training, people development, working practices and working environment are all areas which should be continually reviewed to see where improvements can be made. By following this guide you can ensure that your people management is working effectively and not only increase staff retention and motivation, but also improve the efficiency of the practice for staff and patients alike.

Top Tips for People Management:

1. **Delegate** - Don't attempt to do too much yourself. Use the talents of the people around you, develop and utilise their capabilities fully.
2. **Build Relationships** - Organise regular meetings with your employees and make a point of talking to people visiting the practice. They may have suggestions you had not thought of.
3. **Develop** - Offering your team the opportunity to develop their skills and learn new ones, will ensure loyalty and increase motivation.

4. **Never blame** - People management means taking overall responsibility for your team. To ensure that everyone is clear, have simple and clear standards throughout each area of operation.
5. **Lead by example** - ensure you stick to plans, policies and change programmes like glue, as you can't expect your team to if you don't.
6. **Build Trust** - The best managers are ethically sound, fair and honest. They make promises only when they know they can deliver and treat everyone equally.

Notes to Editors:

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