Looking for ‘love’ in all the wrong places

Which aspect of your practice has the most impact on your bottom line?

By Louis Malcmacher, DDS, MAGD

As a practicing dentist and a dental consultant, I know exactly where dentists are coming from when they describe their daily challenges to me. I hear routinely from dentists about all kinds of problems they are experiencing.

Every dentist that I talk to wants to know how to get more new patients, how to properly market the practice, how to be faster and more efficient clinically, how to reduce overhead, how to motivate more patients to bigger and bigger treatment plans and a whole host of other issues that are constantly on a dentist’s mind.

Dentists will spend all kinds of money on books, tapes, consultants, marketing programs, newsletters and all sorts of other things that they think may improve a particular part of their practice. Most dentists who are looking for these solutions are always, as I like to say, “looking for love in all the wrong places.”

Dentists often overlook the most obvious and impactful part of their practice: the dental team that they work with every single day.

The team

Having a great dental team will significantly improve all aspects of your dental practice immediately and for the long term. Having a great dental team solves so many of the issues and the challenges that dentists face every single day.

Do you want more patients? Your dental team should be out there asking everybody they know if they need a dentist as well as every single patient that comes through the door about referring their own families and friends as new patients to the practice.

Do you want to market your practice better and more efficiently? Having great dental team members who will carry your message with them into every single treatment room will accomplish that.

Do you want to motivate patients to more comprehensive dentistry and more elective dental procedures such as Aurum Ceramics Cristal Veneers? A great dental team will take the time to plant seeds in patients’ minds about what dentistry can accomplish, and these staff members are the most effective communication team you could possibly have.

It always amazes me that a dentist will spend thousands of dollars on a computerized education system that will describe dental procedures when a talented dental assistant can do the same thing with that human and personal touch. By the way, that doesn’t mean that digital education materials aren’t useful.

If your dental team members are poor communicators and you buy them an educational piece of equipment, then what you now have is a dental team with poor communication skills but with an expensive computer.

Why not spend that money to first go ahead to motivate and improve the morale and communication skills in your office so that everybody can talk to patients more easily and with more leadership?

Do you want to reduce your overhead? A great dental team will certainly help you accomplish this by streamlining so many of the inefficient processes that occur in daily dental practice and will help the dentist accomplish dental treatment much faster, easier and better.

Do you want to improve your cash flow and account receivables? A great dental team is the road to success in every dental office in every single aspect you could possibly imagine.

Valued partners in success

I see dentists wasting their time and money buying into all kinds of gadgets, toys, scams and supposed “systems for success” when they should be spending their time, energy and effort developing and motivating their valued staff members.

Every week when I am giving a lecture, for the most part, I can see immediately who the more successful dentists are just by looking at the audience in the first two minutes of the lecture. The most successful dentists I know and that I see at my lectures are the ones who have their dental team members sitting right next to them at the events they attend.

If you, as a dentist, go to a lecture and want to learn about something new or want to institute a new system in your office and you attend the lecture alone and then return to the office, your staff members will not have the same enthusiasm that you developed or the same initial level of interest.

You must then force this new idea down their throats, to which they become resentful. Success in this scenario is going to be limited, but more likely will not happen. It frustrates me because I know the solution is really so simple.

Look at your dental team members as the valued partners in success that they really are.

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Staff appreciation is one of the most overlooked, inexpensive and easiest ways to begin to develop a great dental team.

It may surprise you to know that in many major studies in employee relations, money is not the most important factor to employees. No. 1 is staff appreciation and No. 2 is having a pleasant place to work in.

If your dental team members also realize they are fulfilling a mission of improving peoples’ lives through excellent oral health that also gives them a great sense of purpose.

You could pay a dental assistant $100 per hour, but if she is miserable in the work environment, your office will never be successful. You could pay your front desk team member $100 per hour, but if you have never invested in having him develop the necessary skills to talk to patients, your office will not be successful.

If you pay your dental hygienist $100 per hour and she is just a housekeeper with no communication skills, your office will never reach its full potential.

Being in the ‘people’ business
Ultimately, dentistry is a people business. To be successful in this field, you have to love people and hire people who love people. If you hire people who love people, your office will become a different place.

Stress in dentistry is caused by the people who work in your office who are stressing themselves, you and your patients. Once your patients are stressed, they will stress you even more.

Hiring the right staff is the first step along the road to a happy office. The next steps include working with your team members and constantly training them and yourself in how to do better clinical dentistry, how to be better communicators, how to serve and how to achieve all of your goals together.

This has so frustrated me as I lecture to thousands of dentists a year that I have some resources on my Web site, www.commonsensedentistry.com, about building the best dental team ever.

You need to know how to hire, evaluate and give a bonus to great team members. You must lead and motivate team members with your vision of what you want your practice to be. It really is this simple: if you have a great dental team, you will have a great office!

The simple road to success
Stop wasting your time and money on all the schemes and supposed shortcuts out there that you think may improve your office from the outside in.

Hire, develop and motivate a great dental team by learning leadership skills and build your office from the inside out. It doesn’t help you at all to get 100 new patients per month if your team members do not have the capability or the interest to properly build relationships with your patients.

You, as a dentist, typically spend 50, 40 or 50 hours per week in your dental practice — it is equally as easy to be happy there as it is to be miserable. Life is too short to spend your time in a miserable situation.

In addition, what does your office team look like? Do they have great smiles, are they well groomed, do they dress nicely and cleanly? This says a lot about your practice.

If you are looking to build an esthetic practice, patients are more apt to accept treatment plans from team members (and dentists!) who have a great looking smile and great facial esthetics.

Now that nearly 10 percent of dentists are providing Botox and dermal fillers, it is not just about the teeth anymore in the dental office and the same is to be said about facial esthetics.

I often joke that Botox is the secret to staff retention — once you provide this to your team, they will never leave you because this is a repeat procedure.

Yet the street here runs both ways — it helps build your practice when everyone looks their best — they feel better about themselves from a self-esteem perspective, they transmit a more positive image and treatment acceptance will go up.

If your dental office is a place that loves to work with people, that attitude alone will solve so many of the issues that have frustrated you throughout your career.

When we consult with dental offices and turn their team members around, and make them great and sincere communicators, the office becomes a stress-free, high-producing, low-overhead, fun place to work for everyone.

It is amazing what a little appreciation and respect will do in motivating and building a great dental team.

It is the quickest and straightest road to dental practice success.

A great dental team can …
• help market your practice more efficiently.
• help motivate patients to accept treatment recommendations and elective procedures.
• help improve cash flow and account receivables.

Dr. Louis Malcmacher is a practicing general dentist in Bay Village, Ohio, and an internationally known lecturer and author known for his comprehensive and entertaining style.

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