with the seasons. By nature, dentists are high achievers, and thus more likely to be micromanagers. They don’t get through dental school by leaving the details to someone else. Most are intense, focused perfectionists. In fairness, oftentimes the micromanaging dentist feels a strong sense of responsibility. He/she may well have built the practice from the ground up and may feel that he/she must control all aspects of it. However, like most micromanagers, they tend to confuse activity with accomplishment and, consequently, create bottlenecks of inefficiency. Even more frustrating for these dentists and their staffs is the fact that they are quite capable of thinking strategically, but they simply cannot bring themselves to relinquish control.

They will not allow others to problem solve, and they consistently second-guess decisions. Yet, if the practice is going to grow and truly succeed, the dentist simply must let go.

So how do you help a micromanaging dentist to relinquish a few of those tightly held responsibilities?

Read on.

Strategies for staff

Don’t try to change your micromanaging dentist — only he/she can do that. Instead, work with what you have. One of the greatest needs your micromanager has, outside the need to feel needed, is the need to know. Try to understand where the dentist is coming from.

How can you help your dentist achieve the goals and objectives that he/she has for the entire practice? Where does he/she want to take the business? What matters most to this person in terms of goals? What can you do to help?

For example, perhaps your micromanaging dentist really wants more time for treatment planning to encourage greater case acceptance, but at the same time insists on giving all patients their post-op instructions, which only puts everyone behind schedule.

Develop a detailed, step-by-step plan that outlines how you could help the dentist with this duty. Explain to the dentist that you would like to handle this in a way that he/she will be completely comfortable with and confident that patients receive the post-op information they need.

Trust is critical to the micromanager. Take steps to build it by keeping him/her informed from the beginning and at every step along the way. Even though you are perfectly capable of completing the task without direction from the dentist, be open to his/her input and suggestions.

Most importantly, be completely dedicated. If you drop the ball on responsibilities that you’ve committed to, your micromanaging dentist will not feel that he/she can trust you and will swoop in and take over yet again.

Many dentists are one step ahead of their micromanaging boss by updating him/her regularly. You cannot communicate too much with this type of person, but it is very easy to fall into the trap of thinking that you’ve done everything you need to keep him/her informed.

If you have that task and know about the status of something you have agreed to complete on her behalf, you’re not holding up your end of the bargain in her eyes.

‘ Dentist, live and let go of the minutia.’

How do you spend your days in the office? I know it sounds like an obvious question, but I suspect that many of you dentists would be surprised if you took a close look at what actually consumes a fair amount of your time. Certainly, you’re diagnosing and treating patients, but just how many of your working hours are spent on other less important tasks?

Carry a notepad with you for three to five days and write down everything you do relating to your practice, including reviewing patient records, restocking paper products in the bathrooms, talking to patients, directing staff, calling in prescriptions, completing forms, evaluating prices on supplies, straightening the magazines in the reception area, cleaning out the refrigerator, etc.

After you’ve gathered your data, take a good look at the list. Is it full of items that only the dentist can do? Or do you have a multitude of duties that the staff, whether it’s the assistant, hygienist, associate dentist, scheduling coordinator, business manager, etc., could and should be doing?

Lastly, are there items on that list that no one should be doing because they should be outsourced or because of a lack of technology or broken systems?

You know all too well that there are only so many hours in a day. You want to ensure that yours are spent wisely, not squandered away on activities with little or no return to your practice. And this requires that you invest some of that time learning the art of delegation.

‘ Dentist, delegate, delegate, delegate ... and communicate.’

From the list that you created, choose the top items that directly affect the growth of your practice, specifically diagnosing and treating patients. Most everything else on that list, such as giving post-op instructions, developing the agenda for the next staff meeting, mediating the latest staff tiff, changing the light bulbs, etc., should be delegated.

Now, before you panic at the thought of relinquishing those duties that you feel you only can do, develop a plan to ensure that this transition of tasks goes smoothly and methodically.

Start by sharing your vision with your staff. Are you the only one who knows where you want to take your practice? Being part of a team means understanding the ultimate goals and being vested in achieving those goals.

Next, assess the strengths of those you’ve surrounded yourself with. No, they are not you. No, they didn’t go to dental school. But, if you’ve done your job and hired effectively, chances are that your employees will not only welcome the opportunity to grow as professionals, they will excel as a result of it.

Consider the fact that professional training for some may be necessary to ensure that they have the opportunity to successfully meet your expectations. Your objective in delegating is to provide the resources to ensure that those charged with these new responsibilities will succeed.

That also requires you to clearly communicate your expectations. Perhaps no one has been able to meet your standards because no one really knows what or how it is that you want something done. Effective delegation requires that the employee knows exactly what outcome you want him/her to achieve.

For example, if you are going to delegate delivering post-op instructions to your assistant, presumably you want patients to leave fully understanding which homecare steps they will need to follow.