Motivate and inspire
If you nurture your staff, it’s likely they’ll feel a lot more satisfied in their roles, which means better team spirit and higher productivity, says Jane Armitage

Dr uring a typical morning at our practice, to boost team spirit and motivate staff for the day, we’ll put the bite on, look at the daily to-do list and together we will see what the day has in store for us. But hey, this is dentistry and every day is different, so we prepare for a perhaps uncertain day ahead.

Encouraging staff to perform effectively and achieve objectives is an important part of good management practice. Although motivation is crucial to this process, it can also be effective to reward your staff directly for promoting the practice by maybe having a bonus incentive or doing something which makes them feel appreciated.

Team spirit can be heavily influenced by other team members’ motives and attitudes. To ensure a happy, well-motivated team, you need the right people with the right attitudes working towards the same goal. They will only know that goal if you share that information with them to enable you all to work together.

Room to grow
Good team spirit can only occur when people are satisfied and nurtured with room to grow. To ensure team spirit is maintained, it is essential to ensure that a happy team is a well-motivated one. With this in mind, I would apply the following management tactics.

1 Inform all staff of any changes that are happening to affect their role. Have regular staff meetings with open discussions and seek the team’s views. During these team meetings, ask for their ideas on how to improve the service we are already giving. It is often surprising when you collect information on an open basis like this, as it can encourage each member to give his or her opinion. Some of our best ideas have occurred from holding open meetings like this.

2 Make staff aware of what innovations are being introduced to the practice. Ask for their suggestions on how to improve existing procedures and systems. Be open to new ideas and accept different opinions. Encourage a climate of openness and co-operation. To ensure individual ideas are followed through, staff have to take ownership of their ideas knowing the management team is supporting them.

3 Have regular discussions with staff to encourage a two-way flow of information, so that staff feel safe in the knowledge that no idea would be considered foolish and that sometimes these are often the best ideas. However, the practice culture of openness has to be well established prior to that.

4 Carry out regular appraisals. Individual appraisals are the perfect opportunity to create a personal development plan, which is bespoke to both the member of staff and the needs of the practice. During appraisal, assess how far their performance has met the standards of their job description. See it as a chance to be open, to look at what they are doing and together draft a plan giving targets to aim for. Give feedback using your own management style, and ask if there are other ways you can manage them more effectively.

5 Ask probing questions, even if an individual shows no ambition for promotion, they may still wish to develop skills to make their day more interesting. Encourage further training; allow the study days as in the end this is a win-win situation.

Financial incentives
So what incentives can you offer to increase productivity and increase motivation? Examples I have used are:

- Link pay increases to individual performance using the results of appraisals
- Offer private medical cover, or membership to a local health club
- Offer a practice pension scheme
- Introduce a Christmas bonus and mid-year bonus scheme based on performance, attendance and time keeping. I must admit that when the mid-year review bonus idea was suggested in our practice, I worried about the expense. However, since it has been introduced, we have had fewer sick days and a better team spirit.

Another way of dealing with this would be to divide the monetary amount throughout the year, and pay it in two lots: one in June and one in December. Whatever the amount, the team appreciates it as it is given when needed the most, for example, around holiday and Christmas time.

To summarise
- Ensure you follow the code of equal opportunities
- These are purely suggestions: what works for one won’t for another. Introducing a bonus scheme will add to the practice costs; therefore you need to choose wisely
- By maintaining at least some of the suggestions set out in this article should increase team motivation, however you have to maintain it
- By delivering fairness and opportunity to each and every one should maintain stability between staff
- Show appreciation: it takes nothing to say thank you at the end of the session and it goes a long way. It’s the name of the game.

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Jan Armitage is an award-winning practice manager and has almost 40 years industry experience. She is currently a practice manager for Thompson & Thomas, and holds a Vocational Assessors award. She is also a BDA Good Practice Assessor, BDA Good Practice Regional Consultant, and has a BHA Certificate of merit for services to the profession. She has her own company, JA Team Consultant, and has a BDA Certificate of merit for services to the profession.