Managing team change

When someone leaves your team, or a new person starts, it can be an unsettling time if you don’t know how to deal with the change. BDPMA chairman Amelia Bray offers some advice

Change is never easy for some people

I recall one week in practice, several years ago now when two members of staff both handed in their notice. This may not be a major incident in your business but in the dynamics of the group. This is perhaps an opportunity to look at what your team is lacking and make a conscious effort to hire someone who can fill that gap.

The right team

Hiring quality team members is one of the most important and challenging aspects of our business. Having the right people doing the right job is essential but it doesn’t happen on its own. You have to generate interest in your practice and motivate potential applicants to want to be a part of your vision. You have to ensure that your methods of interview and hiring comply with all necessary legislation, but also that your methods of interviewing the right job is essential but it probably won’t be the same person for each aspect of the job and it makes sense to involve the whole team. But, and this is a big but, it is essential that everyone involved in the process of training is working to the same structure. If one person tackles the recall system in one way, and someone else goes about it another way, then the net result will be complete confusion. This is a good opportunity to ensure that your procedures are standardised. Training decisions are probably best made by discussion among team members who will feel involved in the process and as such will be more willing participants.

Write it down

Training must be an established process within your practice and begins even before you have hired the successful candidate. We send a job description and a person specification to all applicants. A job description is a key tool in running any business; the employees have to know what they are expected to do, and how they are expected to do it. Each role within your organisation should have a complete written job description, so personal changes should be seamless – everything should be carefully documented so that a new employee can almost step into the shoes of the previous incumbent. Written job descriptions also mean that one person can’t hold all the details in their head. I know I have been guilty of that on occasion, but the thought that the practice might grind to a halt in my absence outweighed the feeling that I was indispensable! Now everything is written down in a procedures manual.

Establish training protocols

Once you have made sure that the job description is clear, you need to decide the tasks that are the most important and those that are secondary. What needs to be done first and what has to be done even if nothing else gets done? Then you need to plan the order that you will undertake training; you can’t read ancient Greek until you know the alphabet! Having a structured route through the training process will save time and confusion.

Next, decide who is going to provide the training. It probably won’t be the same person for each aspect of the job and it makes sense to involve the whole team. But, and this is a big but, it is essential that everyone involved in the provision of training is working to the same structure. If one person tackles the recall system in one way, and someone else goes about it another way, then the net result will be complete confusion. This is a good opportunity to ensure that your procedures are standardised. Training decisions are probably best made by discussion among team members who will feel involved in the process and as such will be more willing participants.

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Set realistic goals

Finally you will need to make sure that your training process has timesframes. How quickly do you want your new employee to be able to do their job on their own? Set realistic goals, they won’t be able to do everything within the first week, but continuing the training for months on end could be hugely demoralising. It can be sensible to break down the training into manageable sections, then review each phase on completion and re-consider if the timescales can be flexible. If someone is struggling with learning the complexity of the computer system then give them extra time, don’t rush them or cut corners. Likewise, if they take to sterilising procedures like a fish to water then there is no need to spend ages going back over things they understand.

A change in the team is just one aspect of managing change within the business that we have to deal with. To find out more about change management and more, join the BDPMA for our Management Development Seminars. Full details can be found on our website at www.bdpma.org.uk.

About the author

Amelia Bray joined the industry as a dental nurse in 1994, having previously worked in veterinary and chiropractic clinics. In 2000, she assisted her boss (now husband) to relocate the dental practice from a town centre premises to a converted barn in the middle of an apple orchard in the Tamar Valley, and at this point assumed the role of practice manager. She completed the Diploma in Professional Practice Management in 2004 and has been involved with the BDPMA since 2000, starting out as Treasurer of the Devon and Cornwall Region before joining the National Executive as Assistant Secretary, then Secretary, Treasurer and in 2009, Chairman.

‘The right team means you need to find a person capable of performing their responsibilities excellently and fit in to your existing team. As we all know, a group of people will develop its own personality and changing the individuals involved will have an impact on the dynamics of the group. This is perhaps an opportunity to look at what your team is lacking and make a conscious effort to hire someone who can fill that gap.’

‘Ultimately it is you who will benefit from having a well-trained, harmonious team.’