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.

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 team, but when it represents 40 per cent of your workforce, as it did for us, it was a huge upheaval. Looking back though, it was actually the catalyst for a massive review of our entire business ethos and became the start of a much more focused system for recruitment.

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 personnel changes should be written down in a procedures manual.

Change is never easy for some people and as such will be more willing not 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 re-call 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 personnel changes should be seamless – everything should be 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 out

weighed 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 re-call 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.

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 remember that the timesframes can be flexible. If someone is struggling with learning the complexities of the computer system then give them extra time, don’t rush them or cut corners. Likewise, if they take longer to train in 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.

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

How new team members actually do their jobs, once in position, is largely down to you. Over the years I have worked in several different professional practices, and they have all had very different induction processes from the ‘just get on with it approach’ to the structured mentoring with reviews. We are not all born teachers and it can be very difficult for us to begin to plan a training package. Everyone has a different method of learning, whether it be a highly practical mode or a highly prescriptive method. There are always reasons why training is pushed to the back of the queue but ultimately it is you who will benefit from having a well-trained, harmonious team.

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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 in 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.

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