**It’s never too late to build a dream team**

says Seema Sharma

Dental practices set out planning to have the right staff with the right skills, qualifications, experience and knowledge to look after patients and the practice. Somewhere along the line, things go wrong and emotions run high.

When one of my own practice managers has a bad day at the ranch, nine out of ten times the complaints are about a team member who did not pull their weight or a process that went wrong which could have been prevented with some pre-planning or effort on the part of the team member.

So what goes wrong? Dental practices are busy places and time is at a premium! There are few other professions where everyone has to be on stage from the moment they arrive to the moment they leave. As small businesses, we do not have the capacity to have “floating” staff, recruiting and retaining staff is not easy, but to know how to ensure that they do not impact on patient care.

By taking the time to understand individual strengths and weaknesses, and acknowledging that life outside work can imbalance emotions, practice managers command respect, instead of demanding it.

**STEP 3: Repeat the mantra - Smile you're on stage!**

Encourage a culture of accepting that everyone is human but when the team is at work, personal problems are left outside the front door. It is important for the practice to be supportive of individuals with personal problems, when appropriate, but to know how to ensure that they do not impact on patient care.

By taking the time to understand individual strengths and weaknesses, and acknowledging that life outside work can imbalance emotions, practice managers command respect, instead of demanding it.

**STEP 4: Re-induct using CQC as your goal**

Tell the team that you are getting organised for Care Quality Commission registration, which all practices are affected by from October 2010, and focus on the first two sections - patient information and involvement, and personalisation, care and treatment. Support them. (If you are not up to speed on CQC yet, email seema.sharma@dentabyte.co.uk to find out the outcomes that are expected from dental practices)

CQC registration provides a timely reminder that teams should be able to demonstrate:

- Practice culture and values – it is key to ensure team members understand the vision created by the leader of the practice.
- Organisational structure - outline of each team member’s role as an individual and within the team.
- Policies and procedures – tell the team about your new team manual!

**STEP 5: Appraise and develop**

Staff training needs should be identified and supported, with protected time for learning and development to optimise the team’s skills, happiness, performance and staying power. Ideally a practice should have monthly meetings for clinical governance, which include training and practice management, to keep the team aligned. The quality of the service being provided by the team should be audited regularly and training arranged to align the skills and work of those who are not on track.

**Key tips for practice managers**

- Define individual roles
- Create clear job descriptions for all roles
- Ensure advertisements clearly outline the role which the candidate is applying for
- Treat all applicants equally by using template interview forms and processes
- Offer the job in writing and provide written terms and conditions (contracts or licences)
- Conduct thorough pre-employment checks
- If the new staff member has a probationary period, ensure the details are outlined in the offer letter
- Put new staff members through an induction process
- Provide all team members with a staff handbook/team manual outlining practice policies and procedures
- Organise and record all staff training and continuing professional development
- Monitor individual performance
- Conduct annual appraisals for all team members
- Ensure that all team members have personal/professional development plans to maintain and develop their individual skill sets
- Be aware of the human resource legislative frameworks around working times, holidays, rest breaks, disciplinary procedures, stress, disability etc.
- Maintain an accurate HR record for each team member

**Tomorrow’s Manager**

So how does a practice manager fit all this in? Tomorrow’s practice manager needs to learn to work smarter not harder, to run a smooth practice and maximise the team’s potential. Email the author at seema.sharma@dentabyte.co.uk for a job description for the practice manager of the future, then set about developing your skill set. Your knowledge will translate into an increased bottom line and a stress free practice, your boss will be happy!

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CEO, Dentabyte.co.uk

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