U
pon entering your first “real” dental practice either as an associate or as an owner with little to no degree of hand and requisite experience on your resume, it’s likely that one thing became abundantly clear very early on: The learning process had only just begun. There is a whole lot more to ca
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 inade
nty than most young dentists ever imagine.

Almost without warning, many are tossed into leadership roles seemingly overnight. And it’s that part of the job require
ment that often leaves new den
tists shaking their heads in bewilderment. Certainly, there is a lot to learn as a leader, but here are a few essentials to follow from day one as “The Boss.”

No. 1: Never assume

This is the common pit
fall in leading employees: as
suming that your staff knows what you want. Spell out your ex
pectations and the employees’ responsibilities in black and white for every member of your team from the beginning. Do not convince yourself that because they’ve worked in this dental practice for X number of years that they know how you want things done. This is not the time to be lenient, and they will simply keep performing their responsibilities according to what they think you want un
less they are directed otherwise.

For example, your schedul
ing coordinator may be very ex
perienced in scheduling accord
ing to how other dentists want their days scheduled, whereas, in fact, be very different from how you want your days schedu
led. Good employees want clear direction, and it’s tremen
dously frustrating for everyone when staff are forced to guess at what you want. So speak up.

No. 2: Staff survival = your success

Recognize the strengths and weaknesses among your team members because all employees bring both to their positions. The fact is that some people are much better suited for certain respon
sibilities and not others. Just be
cause Brittany has been handling insurance and collections for the practice doesn’t mean she’s ef
fective in those areas. Look at re
sults. Brittany may be much more successful at scheduling and re
call and would be better suited for those duties. Don’t be afraid to restructure job responsibilities to make the most of team strengths. Invest in training early and often to build loyalty and ensure excel
ence.

No. 5: Give feedback often

Along with clear expecta
tions, direction and guidance, employees crave feedback. Don’t be stingy. Give praise often and appraise performance regularly. Employees want to know where they stand and how they can im
prove. Verbal feedback can be given at anytime, but it is most ef
fective the moment the employee is engaging in the behavior that you either want to praise or cor
rect.

Know the numbers

Certainly, it doesn’t take long for every new dentist to realize that just as important as your role as dentist is your role as CEO. It is critical that you understand com
pletely the business side of your practice. There are 22 practice systems, and you should be well
versed in each of them. If not, seek out training for new den
tists. The effectiveness of the practice systems will directly and greatly impact your own suc
cess today and throughout your entire career.

For starters, routinely monitor practice over
head. It should break down ac


Dental Tribune
United Kingdom Edition
August 7–13, 2009

www.thenewdentist.net
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