Growing pains

Getting a new team of people to respect you takes patience as you learn to reward them, praise them, lead and motivate them, says Sharon Holmes

I have been in management for a long time and sometimes forget how painful it can be. Recently we incorporated two new practices into the Dental Arts Studio; I had a feeling we may meet with some resistance, but I hadn’t anticipated just how painful it was going to be for everyone involved, particularly one of the new practice teams.

After much clenching of teeth and a few sleepless nights, it occurred to me that perhaps the team from one of the new practices was worried about being separated from their departing principal dentist. To overcome this problem, I had to establish trust in them, to enable me to pass on our vision of what we want the Dental Arts Studio to represent.

Future vision

To encourage them to follow our lead I realised that I had to set the scene for them and make them feel comfortable; I had to create a reliable and attractive vision for the future that they would respect and believe in.

As managers and leaders we should never forget that staff look to those in leadership roles for confidence, a sense of calm and direction. The most important thing to remember is to make good decisions when under pressure; with confidence you have done the necessary work needed for these decisions to be right. To make a judgment without investigating the implications can lead to serious disharmony among your staff.

One can never determine the outcome of investing in a new practice; this is something that should be exciting and a challenge - as I have now realised, it is exciting for the purchaser, but not so much for the team left behind.

Best customer care

We took over two practices at the same time and the second by both practice managers on a large scale. We have been developing our administration system over seven years now and it is comprehensive, but very effective. Again, this means dealing with stressed staff. The training, however, must continue until they are able to work single-handed without too much micro-management.

You have to show patience and you have to continually encourage your team as they grow into the new systems put before them. It is not only about systems and progress; it is about giving your new team the time they need to adjust.

A happy environment

Creating a good atmosphere is not only easy, it is also essential. For your team to respect you, you have to learn to reward them, praise them, lead and motivate them. Deal with issues head on – don’t ignore friction as it does not go away, otherwise this will be the undoing of your team.

It is difficult when you are responsible for a team of people you did not choose and you may not like. In return, they may not like you and on top of this you have to do your job well. This might seem like a rather tall order, but as a manager you have been given a trusted and privileged position. You are a manager – so you must manage.

Not very long ago I met a nurse at a dental function and most of our conversation was based on how miserable their practice manager was; as a result, the staff were too frightened to approach her on practice issues to such a degree that the staff were unable to self-develop. I asked her why they did not approach the principal dentist and she sadly informed me that he was not interested as she did a good job with the administration.

Note to self: I never want to be described as “miserable”. My motto is and always will be, to ‘lead by example’. A good manager is there to help the team grow and develop, even if you have a larger team to manage. You could utilise part-time staff to cover for people to go on courses to further their self-development.

As Peter F Drucker says: ‘Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things’.  

About the author

Originally from South Africa, Sharon Holmes has worked in the field of dental practice management since 1992. She received hands-on training from the first dentist who employed her in 1992, which gave her a broad experience in knowing what’s involved in providing dental treatment. Arriving in the UK in 2002, she took a post in a mixed NHS and private practice in Wimbledon, eventually taking over its management, converting it to a fully private practice. In 2005, she moved to London City Dental Practice where after 18 months, was responsible for managing four practices in the group. The London City Dental Practice is now part of a mini-co-operative group called the Dental Arts Studio, of which she has been instrumental in its creation. She holds the position of operations director and manages every aspect of the group alongside her principal dentists.