At the Dental Arts Studio, our infrastructure is made up of sound practice policies and procedures to guide and direct all staff in their daily duties, creating a streamlined routine for both the nurses and the dentists.

Each member of staff should be given a job description at the onset of employment, which immediately explains what is expected of them. They would also have had a full induction to the practice, which settles them in.

Noticing individuals

Recognising each team member’s role and their importance within the team, builds up a healthy respect among staff. Those who are treated with respect will in return offer respect. As a practice manager, you should adopt a ‘lead by example’ attitude in managing your team.

Communication is another key factor that can either make or break a team. When you are giving your team instructions, remember to talk to them and not at them. There’s nothing worse than feeling that you are being spoken down to, especially when the practice manager may be younger than the dentists or more senior nursing staff.

Remember – communication is not just about talking, it is also about listening. Staff must also feel that they can approach you and not feel that you are dismissing them when you’re busy. This could cause a breakdown in the practice, which will eventually affect all of your staff.

Learning to say thanks

At the Dental Arts Studio, we have a ‘Staff Member of the Month’ programme, whereby we reward our staff with a gift voucher for a beauty treatment. We present awards during staff meetings, and we offer our thanks and appreciation. I have seen the difference this makes to the winning staff members.

Always take the time to say thank you to your staff for the contribution they make. Even when you have a tough day and have had to lean on staff for support, you must find time to thank them.

We have recently introduced regular meetings into our weekly agenda. Every morning, the reception staff at the Clapham Junction practice meet at 8.30am, and the practice manager sets the agenda for the day.

Mid-week, a staff meeting is held for all the dental receptionists and dental nurses. A separate mid-week financial meeting is held with the dentists. You’d think with all these meetings in place, the practice would run like clockwork… well as I often say, expectation can lead to disillusionment.

To go forward successfully, it’s essential to have a happy dental team. To create and mould a happy dental team takes a sound infrastructure with regards to practice management, which in turn takes time, dedication, perseverance and a lot of self-discipline, says Sharon Holmes.
The staff are not always keen to participate in meetings, so it is extremely important you make these meetings meaningful and educational. I have also found that if you let the team help you create better systems, they feel involved and as though they have achieved a goal if the system works.

Is everyone listening?
If you find yourself having to repeat yourself over and over again as staff are not doing what you are asking of them, you need to take a constructive approach and analyse why they are not listening to you.

If someone is not sure of what they are doing, take the time to go through the process with them again and give them tools to help them to achieve what you have set out. Sometimes it may take “micro-management” for a while. For example, we have lab books in the surgery and also in the reception area.

The lab books in the surgery let nurses know where their lab work has been sent and when it is due back. The nurses look at this lab book every day to ensure that the work due has been delivered.

For some reason though, the nurses don’t make use of this tool. If you are aware of this and lab work is continually late, the situation may need monitoring. For a period of time, you should keep tabs on the treatment that has taken place during the day and ask the nurse to show you they’ve written up their lab book at the end of each day.

This may sound petty and painful but I ask myself, which is worse – an angry patient or a nurse who knows they are being monitored. If the nurse still does not respond at this point, you need to take a closer look at the person’s attitude and decide what is best for the practice and the team.

Horses for courses
Over the years, I’ve learned that not all people are like-minded and at work you are going to have a different mix of employees. Some people can deal with directness, while others are more sensitive and require a more gentle approach.

There is nothing more worthwhile than seeing a member of staff flourish and it makes me proud to know that perhaps I had a small part to play.

Remember – a happy team is a productive team. As Winston Churchill once said: ‘Never give in, except to convictions of honour and good sense’.

About the author
Originally from South Africa, Sharon Holmes moved to the UK in 2002. She thoroughly enjoys her position as business development manager at the Dental Arts Studio and her role in the dental industry, which has moulded her into a winner in her field. She believes that her position is based on common sense.