Leading the way to Great Dental Care

Good leadership and management by Glenys Bridges

At every level of dental care provision the skills required for good leadership and management are becoming increasingly important. Dental teams with good leadership and management consistently meet compliance requirements defined in the regulations of the Health and Social Care Act and the Dentists Act. These requirements challenge dental professionals to develop a new range of non-clinical skills not only to meet standards, but also to ensure that doing so realises tangible benefits for patients, the team and the business.

The Chartered Management Institute recognises a six step model of leadership and management. This model begins with the development and communication of goals (the vision) leading to the creation of small achievable steps to achieve the vision, set out in a business plan. This requires leadership skills to define what the team is aiming to achieve and create excitement about the vision, through the progression of these steps:

Step 1 - set the vision
Good leadership starts with 'the end in mind'. These leaders have a clear vision of goals the practice is working toward. These goals should be defined in the long term over the next five to ten years, the middle term over the next one to five years and short term over the next year. Once goals are defined work can begin on planning how they will be achieved and targets can be set for each aspect of the plan.

Step 2 - Encourage creativity and drive change
The most effective leaders are charismatic individuals. To drive continuous improvement, they need to inform, involve and inspire their people so that they can take them out of their comfort zones and on to new levels of achievement. These leaders understand that if you do what you have always done, you get what you already have. For new levels of achievement, teams need to step out of their comfort zones. This can be scary but with the right preparation and support it can be very rewarding.

Steps one and two are the leadership phase; from step three onwards management skills are required to turn the aspirations into reality. Now it's time for managers to decide 'How' to realise the vision by planning, training the team and deploying resources. Steps three to five are governance steps.

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Step 5 - Planning, organising and allocating work
With the strategic goals in place the management role begins with the development of SMART objectives. These objectives are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound. These are operational goals based on measurable end results and consideration of how to make best use of the skills and resources available. They consider how each individual aspect fits into the strategic plan and sets a time frame for monitoring and completion.

Step 4 - Instructing the team
Information, communication and knowledge are the life blood of successful business operations. Policies and working procedures supported by working instructions drive consistent results. Working instructions should be written by those carrying out the procedures they cover and should be continuously developed as the task evolves.

Step 5 - Co-ordinate the resources
Good management requires an operational plan and appropriate resources. By the time step five has been reached the operational plan is in place to direct the deployment of resources such as people, budgets and time. Clever management allows the best use of resources, without driving people so hard that they are unable to produce their best work.

Step 6 - Measuring and correcting performance
To ensure continuous improvement take time out to compare the results achieved to the SMART objectives set at step three. This is an audit, or gap analysis process that can be used to recognise and reward success as well as for making the corrections needed to keep the strategic plan on track.

Even in small dental teams these skills are needed at three management levels, individuals will invariably work at more than one level:

1. Senior management - setting strategic goals and inspiring others
2. Middle management - setting operational goals to deliver the strategic goals
3. Junior management - managing tasks

Clear leadership is the starting point for the success of any team. When leaders know and understand their role they are able to inspire their teams. Good leaders understand how by defining the practice’s vision and setting it out as strategic goals and plans can lead the team to achieve them. Formal training in leadership and management can enable dental professionals to excel in these roles. To find BTEC level three and four qualifications geared for dental teams visit www.dentac.co.uk

About the author
Glenys is an experienced management trainer and assessor with 20 years’ experience of working with General Dental Practitioners and their teams. In addition, she has expertise and qualifications in Counseling and Life Coaching. Her first book Dental Practice Management and Reception was published in 2006 her second book Dental Management in Practice was published during 2012.

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