Mentoring strategy in dental teams
Glenys Bridges discusses mentoring

The concept of senior colleagues supporting the work of more junior colleagues, by sharing the benefits of their hands-on experience is a time-honoured activity. To take this a stage further as part of their induction processes, an increasing number of practices are creating buddying relationships. Their aim is to formalise a skills transfer process which previously happened in an ad hoc style. In many cases guidance from a senior colleague has been very much valued by employers and employees alike. This article explores ways to build a mentoring strategy for your practice, which will secure increased benefits from these beneficial interactions.

I am often asked if mentoring is just another name for coaching. The answer is that although there is significant crossover in these interactions, essentially mentors must have actual hands-on experience and expertise in the work role of their mentee. Whereas, in coaching the expertise is coaching rather than applied skills. In this way many business coaches have not ‘walked in the shoes’ of the clients. Because the dental team mentor’s skills are in the delivery of dental care, to support their work the practice needs to create a mentoring strategy and provide training and support. In this way all parties are able to secure measurable benefits through mentoring.

Mentoring success depends upon numerous factors, not least finding a best fit mentor and mentee match. A structured mentoring process must be managed in exactly the same way as all other practice activities. This begins with a clear vision to create the design, implementation, support and evaluation processes for your mentoring scheme.

Successful mentoring is dependent upon the participation of senior colleagues as mentors and also as mentees. This is a prime example of leading from the top. The best mentoring schemes start small and grow gradually, stimulated by enthusiasm, positive examples and organisational support. Here is some guidance for the creation of an effective mentoring scheme at your practice:

• Establish the purpose of the scheme - Define who will be involved, what they will do and the expected results. Begin by finding out what mentoring is already happening on an informal basis and assess how valued this format of learning and development is at present.

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• Establish the purpose of the scheme - Define who will be involved, what they will do and the expected results. Begin by finding out what mentoring is already happening on an informal basis and assess how valued this format of learning and development is at present.
• Appoint a mentoring lead-
  someone with responsibility
  for managing and helping to
  sort out difficulties within the
  mentoring scheme and its re-
  lationships. This person will
  need to be able to measure
  and assess personality types
  and learning styles to find
  mentor-mentee matches.

• Define mentoring activi-
  ties. Mentoring to introduce
  new employees to practice
  routines is the relatively brief,
  phase one of the mentoring
  process. On completion of
  this phase the more enduring
  phase two begins. This ongo-
  ing stage is where mentors
  help colleagues focus on their
  challenges, choices, cause
  and effect to help them to find
  creative solutions, learn from
  experience and decide how to
  apply learning to their work-
  ing practices.

• Consider what factors will
  help and hinder mentoring
  in your team – do you have
  top management support,
  All team members need some level of
  support are people willing to partici-
  pate, do they have time? Once
  people start to see tangible
  benefits from mentoring it
  becomes easier and the rela-
  tionship built becomes endur-
  ing during challenging times.

• Ensure you have support in
  place for mentors – Training
  and skills development are
  the mentor’s initial needs. But
  who mentors the mentor? It is
  important that every mentor
  has the chance to reflect on
  their mentoring practice with
  a mentoring supervisor, who
  has the chance to reflect on
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  the mentor’s initial needs. But
  and skills development are
  place for mentors – Training
  • Ensure you have support in
  • Set the ground rules - Ground rules provide the
  working framework needed to
develop a safe mentoring en-
vironment. (Table 1)

After the Initial stages
As with all relationships, men-
toring relationships grow and
develop. New employees will
inevitably look to established
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About the author
Glenys Bridges is an experienced
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