

# Denturist Employee Management Practice

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Employees - can't live with 'em...

Pretty much anything taught on the subject of management is all common sense stuff that we can say we already know. However, I find reading concepts on management inspiring and a reminder for me to evaluate my own management style. I fully believe that the more aware we make ourselves of all our actions the more likely we are to lead satisfying lives. So here are 10 principles to consider when working with your staff.

## 1. Demonstrate That You Value People

In the last issue we discussed taking 100% responsibility for your practice and that definitely includes the people you surround yourself with. As an employer, I don't believe in "halfway" when it comes to employees. They are either employed by you or they are not. If they are part of your team then it becomes your mission, as an employer, to demonstrate that YOU value THEM! And it does take constant vigilance and practice on the employer's part to make that happen. Take a day and commit yourself to evaluate every single interaction with your employees. Ask yourself "did this interaction leave the employee feeling more confident and enthused to work here?" If the answer is "yes", then I believe the employee will be more likely to want to improve themselves, improve the clinic, and work harder for you. So start evaluating your facial expressions, your body language, and your words on a regular basis. Your goal is to demonstrate your appreciation for each person's unique value. No matter how an employee is performing on their current task, your value for the employee as a human being should never falter and always be visible.

## 2. Listen to Your Horses

Ten years ago I read a truly inspirational non-fiction book that solidified the way I wanted to manage people. The book, however, was not about people at all. The book is called "The Man Who Listens to Horses" by Monty Roberts. It's a fascinating read. The parallel that I drew from it is that kicking your employees is not effective. Some employers believe that employees need a good swift kick in the behind to work and that employees should be fearful of the employer. I think this style of management is negatively circular. Each kick in the behind will leave the employee less motivated and the employer will have to kick harder each subsequent time. Monty believes that there is no such thing as a bad horse, only bad horse owners. In the case of managing people I wouldn't recommend spending too much time trying to rehabilitate problem employees. If they are truly bad, then let them go, find a good one, and keep them good. Once you have a good employee and a problem occurs, first try asking yourself what is wrong with the work system that caused the person to fail. Sometimes they just simply screw up, but it's worth putting some serious thought into the issue. Truly think how you would like to be treated if the tables were turned...not what is wrong with the person.

## 3. Providing the Feedback

Ok, you want to inspire people, but how do you do that when they really screw up? It's a problem for sure. Feedback almost always feels like a kick in the arse. But it doesn't have to at all! Very few people give good feedback. It is a practicable skill. Here's a technique that I like. It's called the "feedback sandwich", and it goes like this:

- 1) Say something nice (anything)
- 2) Explain the "bad"
- 3) End with something very positive and inspiring (like "I know you can do this" or recognize something else they did very well)

The trick about explaining the bad is to separate the person from the action. Focus entirely on the action. Explain what was done, why it's not the best way, and how to change it. Avoid saying their name with the action and avoid saying "you", if possible! The term "you" is very accusatory and puts people in defensive mode. Coaches, managers, spouses, and people in general all make the same common mistakes when providing "feedback" – they invariably do not separate the person from the action. Frequent feedback is very important so that people know how they are doing. Many managers only give critical feedback. It's just as important to remember to reward and give recognition as well. People deserve your constructive feedback, too, so they can continue to develop their knowledge and skills.

#### 4. Share Goals and Direction

Where possible make progress on goals, measurable and observable. Some things are very important but tough to measure. It's important to be friendly, but this is something that is difficult to measure. However, you could tell an employee to be friendly or you can tell them it's their mission to ensure each client leaves the office happier than when they walked in. You can even go through your schedule and chat about it at the end of the day – "Which clients definitely left happier?"

#### 5. Share Leadership Vision

People want to feel that they are part of something bigger than themselves and their individual jobs. How to achieve this will be very different between people and clinics. The usual recommendation is to get your staff together and have a formal team building session to develop a mission statement. But let's face it: "developing" a mission statement is not everybody's cup of tea. Employees have to truly buy into what you are doing. Before organizing a meeting that you know will make them roll their eyes or feel uncomfortable, ease into it with productive water cooler chat that makes them feel included in the decisions of the business. Or find an outside project to help build your team. Make a plan for everyone to join a running clinic in order to be able to run the local 10 km charity event next year as a team. Or fund raise for something. Once they get used to goal setting and working as a team, then having regular team meetings for the office will seem natural. The more often, the better. I like to do a 15 minute team meeting every morning in our office. It sets a positive "get stuff done" tone and people have the opportunity to communicate issues or items that need addressing.

#### 6. Trust People

This goes into the "All or None" theory about employees. If you truly can't trust them, let them go. If you can trust them ... then **TRUST** them. Trust that the intentions of people are to do the right thing, make the right decision, and make choices that, while maybe not exactly what you would decide, still work. In so doing they will become more effective employees.

#### 7. Delegate Authority and Impact Opportunities, Not Just More Work

Delegation goes hand in hand with trust. And don't just delegate the drudge work; delegate some of the fun and/or important stuff, too. I know several denturists that let their receptionist seat the patient and get them comfortable, start to educate them on the process, and do some of the prep work. This does several things: the denturist can get more done; the receptionist feels important and like part of the health care team; and the patient feels like the denturist is a specialist when he walks in after someone else did the groundwork in the operatory. The employee will grow and develop new skills and your plate will be less full.

#### 8. Provide Information for Decision Making

Make certain that you have given people, or made sure that they have access to, all of the information they need to make thoughtful decisions.

## 9. Socratic Method

Socrates is thought to be one of the greatest teachers of all time. Yet he maintained that he never taught anyone a thing. His method was to question his students in such a way that they arrived at the wisest course of action by themselves. Many effective managers guide by asking questions, not by telling grown up people what to do. People generally know the right answers if they have the opportunity to produce them. When an employee brings you a problem to solve, ask, "What do you think we should do to solve this problem?" Or ask, "What action steps do you recommend?" Employees can demonstrate what they know and grow in the process.

## 10. Help Employees Feel Rewarded and Recognized for Empowered Behavior

When employees feel under-compensated, under-titled for the responsibilities they take on, under-noticed, under-praised, or under-appreciated, don't expect results from an employee empowerment program. Don't hire receptionists, hire office managers. Talk about "our clinic." Ask their opinions and praise their ideas. Brag about them to their family and friends. The basic needs of employees must feel met for employees to give you their discretionary energy, that extra effort that people voluntarily invest at work.

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