

Delegate to Motivate

The Key to Team Success

As an educator with more than 30 years of experience, I would like to offer an honest perspective from the auxiliary side of the chair. I feel confident in making the assumption that dentists across the country desire a staff of competent, communicative, loyal, and motivated employees. It is obvious when this exists—a positive and efficient work environment results.

Based on my years of clinical and educational experience, the secret to achieving the ideal dental team lies in the dentist identifying the strengths of each team member and delegating duties that match those skill sets. When one team member is learning a new skill, other team members in the office will be open and willing to also enhance their knowledge and become more involved with office protocol and procedures.

Delegating duties

Some examples of delegable duties for dental assistants include, but are not limited to, preliminary impressions, intraoral photography, fabricating whitening trays, provisionals, and coronal polishing. The scope of practice for expanded function dental assistants (EFDA) in some states allows placement of bases/liners, matrices/wedges, placing and contouring amalgam, and composite restorations. If a dentist educates and/or sends the interested dental assistant to a course, the assistant can complete this portion of the patient visit, while garnering more responsibility, building self-confidence, and becoming a more motivated, dedicated staff member.

Delegation of duties can be a touchy subject. The conflict is that, while all dentists demand professional, educated employees, some dentists fall short in communicating with staff about their job descriptions and where improvements could be made. I highly recommend the dentist take the time to thoroughly get to know each employee and assist all employees in pinpointing a specific area of expertise or interest in the office. Then, once the skill or duty is identified, the dentist needs to display confidence that the staff member can perform the duty. Of course, all procedures must be

prescribed by the dentist and performed under his or her direct supervision. In most states, this is defined as the dentist remaining in the facility and evaluating the procedure upon completion.

Implementing CE

The first steps for building this newly motivated staff include conducting routine staff meetings and involving the entire office in continuing education (CE). The CE you offer might be a lunch-and-learn from a manufacturer's representative, for example, which are usually free to the dental office.

In addition to providing CE in-house, the dentist should help the assistant find other local CE opportunities. Consider taking your staff to attend the same CE courses that you attend. Certified dental assistants are required by the Dental Assisting National Board (DANB) to take 12 CE units per year; some additional requirements are state-specific, based on scope of practice for EFDAs.

I have seen dentist-employee relationships succeed and fail. Those that fail never seem to review performance, focus solely on production, do not conduct regular staff meetings to improve communication, do not involve staff in CE opportunities—and then seem surprised when they have high turnover.

Those that succeed are, in my opinion, a direct result of the entire dental team honestly caring about the "whole package"—that is, taking the time to know how each employee really feels about his or her position and helping him or her to achieve a level of satisfaction. Patients in these practices can sense the mutual respect of each team member and, as a result, have a very positive dental appointment. ♦



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