

Managing Your Employees

-A Humanitarian Approach

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Let us get one fact straight. A dental clinic is nothing short of a corporate office when it comes to the necessity of genuine management skills. Gone are the days when manual expertise and gold medals were enough to get a practice running. In today's era of cut-throat-competition when every road, colony and market has become home to dozens of Private Practitioners, it's not just you but also your employees who matter. From the receptionist, the assistants and the lab technicians to your colleagues; all play an important part in putting up the best show. Because to be really successful one has to project an image of being successful at all times of the day. I intend to write many articles on things that helped me to manage my humble practice successfully. In this article I have put forth a compilation of ideas that management gurus swear by, and ideas that have helped me to keep my employees happy and contented. Before I go on, I wish to make one thing clear. All successful clinicians follow these practices knowingly or unknowingly. I have just attempted to put all these ideas in one place for the benefit of Dental World readers.

Successful clinicians appear to be emotionally inert in order to serve all the demands they're required to meet each day. The good news is that a leader who's well liked by his or her employees inspires loyalty which in turn increases productivity and keeps spirits high. Here are some tips and tricks I have read about, applied and enjoyed over 30 years with my employees, subordinates and even my children (both dental students) that demonstrate effective staff management skills. These suggestions will help you consistently show your employees that you care about them and the work they do.

1. The 4 Step Cycle of Employee Management: Hire, Inspire, Admire, Retire

a. Hire This first step is probably the most important. It is important to hire the best people you can find. This is not a time to be cheap. The cost of replacing a bad hire far exceeds the marginal additional cost of hiring the best person in the first place. • Hire talent, not just trainable skills. Skills can be taught to a talented employee. A skilled employee can not just be given talent.

• Improve your interviewing skills. Ask the right questions. Look for dependable references and always check the same. • Make the duties of the person absolutely clear. If you intend a dental assistant to empty the chair-side trash cans, or clean the chair, or even answer the phone in case of urgent situations LET HIM KNOW AT THE TIME OF HIRING. One of the most common resentments that my employees used to feel was "this is not part of my duties, why should I do it?" • Make the pay scale and more importantly the date of pay very clear. • Take all details of employee as per Delhi Police requirements.

b. Inspire

Once you have recruited the best employees to come to work on your team, the hard part begins. You have to inspire them to perform to their capabilities. You have to challenge and motivate them. That is where you will get their best effort and their creativity that will help your organization excel. • Make them welcome. Make them feel like part of the team from the first day. • Be a leader, not just a manager.

c. Admire

Once you have hired the best employees and have challenged and motivated them, you can not relax. The biggest mistake a manager can make is to ignore employees. The same attention you paid to their work assignments, to their satisfaction levels, to their sense of being part of a great team needs to continue for as long as they are in your group. As soon as you start to slack off, their satisfaction and motivation decreases. If you don't do something, they will become disenchanted and will leave. You want TGIM (thank goodness it's Monday) employees not TGIF (thank goodness it's Friday) ones. • Give them positive feedback as much as you can, even if it's just a good word. • Provide appropriate rewards and recognition for jobs done well. • Create referral programs and reward your employees for referring other employee candidates "who are just as great as you".

d. Retire

This is when you know you have been successful. When employees see your company as the employer of choice, they will join you. When they recognize you as a good boss and a real leader, they will stay around. As long as you continue to inspire, motivate, and challenge them, they will continue to contribute at the high levels you need in order to beat your competition. They will be long-term employees; even staying with you and your company until they retire. They will refer other quality employees to your company, including their relatives. You will attract and retain second and even third generation employees.

This four step cycle is the brainchild of noted management authority John Reh. I took the liberty of adding a 5th Step:

e. Fire

It is of utmost importance that you fire the dirty fish of the pond before it pollutes everything, in this case everyone. Keep your eyes open for unreasonable discontent, lethargy or disobedience. Best of all, talk to one of your good trusted employees about any anti-establishment or friction causing elements in the work force. FIRE THEM PROMPTLY. A good employee picks up faster from the bad one than vice-versa.

2. Daily Measures: that help tremendously

a. The start of the day is a great time to demonstrate high levels of enthusiasm for the new workday. Go out of your way to greet your employees. Deliver compliments early in the day to put your employees in a positive frame of mind as they face their day.

b. Give your employees lots of opportunities to see you frequently throughout the day. Walk around the company with your head high and a smile on your face. Avoid hiding out in your office doing paperwork for hours at a time. If your employees don't see you during the day, they can feel ignored or (worse yet) demoralized. Just remember the two golden words 'WALK AROUND'. Do this as often as you can. This will reassure your employee and the patient as well as help you keep a check on any treatment in action.

c. Create a locked suggestion box and periodically review the contents. Let your employees know you're concerned about their well being by addressing their issues. If this is not feasible in your setup, create a system of hierarchy even within the assistants who are all seemingly equal. The best thing to do is to ask your employees to relate their grievances to an impartial 'senior' assistant who presents all the information to you in your free time. Discourage impulsive childish complaints put up to you at any time or place.

d. Offer incentives for your employees to show them you care about them. Offer flex time to those qualified people who need it for personal reasons (a sick child, family functions, etc.). Create special privileges for those who excel (e.g. using the clinic telephone)

Apart from the above, the best thing that you can do is to take care of the Medical and Dental needs of your 'good' staff. I have helped so many of my assistants, receptionists, lab techies, doctors, even drivers and sweepers in getting medical and dental treatment for themselves and their family that I have lost count. Go out of the way to help them and especially their parents and you will see the most spectacular rise in efficiency.

e. Encourage friendships among co-workers. People want to have friends at work, yet many are too busy or too shy to know how to go about it. Encourage interaction by giving your employees the chance to spend time with other employees within your office.

f. Manage your anger. I hope that you note this: I do not recommend hiding your anger. It's just that you should know when to show anger and when to show disappointment. When to scold the employee alone and when in front of others. I guess this is the most delicate of all the rules. The key is acting according to the situation. When you wish to impress a point upon all the employees, then scold one of them when they are all at one place. These points usually pertain to punctuality, manners, cleanliness etc. In cases of personal incompetence, I prefer scolding the person concerned immediately at chair-side (firm...NOT LOUD) or alone in my office later (may be loud). For your doctor employees just know the difference between positive critique and negative criticism. Scold the doctor and follow it by a "... this was for your good" speech making it look like what a grand favor you have done the person by scolding him/her.

h. Help your employees to grow and actively support long term career growth. If you think a particular employee doing what he is intended to very well, and he has extra time, give him more responsibilities and increase his pay (even a slight raise would do). When a person feels he is developing and on the rise, his increased self esteem drives him to higher efficiency. Also, he is more likely to stick to you if he sees growth.

g. Show your humanity. Everyone loves a person with a good sense of humor. You don't need to tell jokes, but learn to laugh out loud easily and often. Sometimes I watch cricket matches with the staff, standing casually in the waiting room near closing time. I give them Diwali gifts. And I have treated my entire staff to an evening meal for every Monday in the past decade. Without fail. I believe in the famous Dale Carnegie quote:

"You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you."

Along the way, you will have had some of the most efficient employees, some of the most productive employees, and the lowest employee costs. You will be able to spend the money you save in this way on other key competitive elements, including raises and bonuses for all employees.

To summarize, doing full justice to the theme, just remember that If we can by any method establish a relation of mutual trust BETWEEN the laborer and the employer, we shall lay the foundation stone of a structure that will endure for all time.