What makes an award-winning practice?

by Aida Mujan¹

To have a truly successful dental practice, the practice owner needs to develop, execute and own a new business vision and purpose. What is the business need?

How can you provide a better service to your patients? What improvements can you make to staff and patients? Who are your patients and who would you like to be your patients? What kind of leader should the business owner be? How can the whole practice be involved in the practice?

These questions about the practice need to be answered in collaboration with the whole dental team, incorporating their input and ideas to generate a business strategy.

Collaboration with all the dental team will inspire a more positive reaction from staff, and is the first step in genuine employee engagement, where staff feel fully involved and listened to in creating a shared vision of where the practice is going, and how it will get there.

their own skills. This is also a great opportunity to reassess training needs; look at future business goals and decide whether there is a skill set lacking in the team and then asking for volunteers to be trained up to fill the skill gap.

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By listening and collaborating, these staff members will feel more engaged and inspired to harness their own individual strengths to meet the practice business goals and objectives.

They will also feel more committed to the future, as all employees will be contributing

Strong foundation

Being the best practice is not just about having better resources and facilities, high levels of pay, huge investment in perks or formal development opportunities, but about how well the whole team works together from the top to the bottom and from the bottom up.

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That is the single most effective way to build a strong foundation to a successful practice.

Organisational research has focused more and more on how employee engagement can make the difference between business success or failure. Numerous studies have proved that employee engagement is integral to innovation, productivity, profitability, safety, attendance and turnover.

Employees who are fully engaged feel they are getting as much from the practice as the practice is getting from them. Research findings suggest that around 30 per cent of employees are genuinely engaged at work - they want to give their best. Around 70 per cent are disengaged - they have no interest in contributing to the performance of the business and may be actively sabotaging it.¹ It is only those practices that can motivate this silent majority to go beyond the call of duty who will become truly successful dental practices.

Positive leadership

What has been most consistently reported is that the most stressful and disengaging element of anyone's job is their line manager. At the same time, the right kind of leadership behaviour can have a powerful positive effect upon employee engagement. Of course, there are other factors that can create a marked improvement such as a new role or enhanced facilities but none of these has a sustained effect.

One management tool that is used by successful leaders is regular and consistent performance appraisals. Conducted over a period of time appraisals can facilitate employee engagement and lead to a successful dental practice.

The most successful performance appraisals are ones that not only ask senior managers what they think makes them effective but also ask employees at all levels what they most value in leaders who are highly effective and enhance their engagement.

Examples of key characteristics of positive leadership include:

- Treat every employee as a "whole person"
- Have positive expectations of what employees can achieve
- Treat employees as intelligent human beings, who are experts in their own context
- Consider and investigate their personal aspirations and ambitions
- Invite them to contribute to the practice vision and future goals
- Regularly conduct performance appraisals.

Top tips for effective performance appraisal

1. Lead appraisal process passionately and purposefully
2. Identify employee's extra-material motivation
3. Link employee's professional goals with the practice's objectives
4. Minimise administrative requirements
5. Provide constructive feedback sensitively
6. Foster a culture of learning and personal development
7. Continue appraisal process beyond annual formal meeting
8. Raise awareness of development needs positively.

No other management mechanism has as much influence over individuals' careers and working lives. Performance appraisal can be the most powerful instrument that dental practices possess to mobilise the energy of every employee toward the achievement

Performance appraisals

What is the purpose of performance appraisal? Performance appraisal serves over a dozen different purposes in a dental practice. They:

- Provide feedback to support staff and associates about their performance
- Determine individual training and development needs
- Determine practice training and development needs
- Determine who gets promoted
- Facilitate layoff or downsizing decisions
- Encourage performance improvement
- Set and measure goals
- Counsel poor performers
- Determine compensation changes
- Encourage coaching and mentoring
- Support manpower planning or succession planning
- Confirm that good hiring decisions are being made
- Provide legal defensibility for personnel decisions
- Improve overall practice performance.

of strategic goals. Used well, performance appraisal can focus every individual's attention on fulfilling the practice's vision and values.

1. <http://www.grfcpa.com/resources/articles/a-disturbing-70-percent-of-employees-are-not-engaged-in-their-jobs/>

For more information on performance appraisals the BDA Training Essentials course portfolio offers a one-day interactive course for the whole team, *Develop and deliver a performance appraisal system tailor made for your practice*, on Friday 22 May 2015 in London. Aida Mujan and her colleague Xanthi Kallis will help you implement this crucial management tool. Visit www.bda.org/training or call BDA Events on 020 7563 4590 for further information and to book your place.

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