

Delegation – An Important Management Tool in Dental Practice

While delegation is a logical goal for leaders to use in order to improve their own performance and overall effectiveness, the person who is receiving the delegated responsibilities may need to move through stages of development before being ready to accept new and different tasks. The progression toward delegation is:

1. Direction - - a new auxiliary needs specific job description and direction in order to know what is expected of him/her.
2. Coaching - - an effective leader/coach teaches the rules of the game, trains, and then lets the players run with the ball. Bring that concept into the way you delegate to auxiliaries.
3. Encouragement - - a seasoned player needs a leader/coach to encourage and to appreciate him/her. Give feedback often.
4. Delegation - - a seasoned auxiliary, like a seasoned player, should be able to use her/his own initiative and to be held responsible for results. Occasional coaching and continuous encouragement are necessary.

Message to the Dentist:

A way to get a handle on whether delegation is needed and if your dental practice is ready for this step, think about this checklist.

1. Do you take paperwork home almost every night?
2. Do you have several long-range projects postponed until you “get time”?
3. Do you feel it is a sign of weakness to need assistance to keep up with your work?
4. Do auxiliaries often interrupt you for help and advice when they know the answers?
5. Do most staff members feel they should bring problems to you rather than make decisions themselves?
6. Do you spend part of your day doing things for others that they could do for themselves?
7. Do you reserve details in operation of the office for yourself that you particularly enjoy, even though someone else could do them?
8. Do you feel you must keep close tabs on details to have the job done right?
9. Do you lack confidence in people, i.e., are you afraid to risk giving them more responsibility?
10. Are you a perfectionist about details that do not affect the final outcome of a project?
11. In delegating, do you often withhold information purposely or unconsciously?
12. After delegating, do you grow apprehensive and hover over the person who is doing the job?
13. Are your people unprepared to take on more responsibilities, either because of lack of training or self-confidence or due to your refusing to turn loose?

To make delegation more effective, doctor, do you:

(“Yes” answers indicate you are on the right track.)

1. Try to create an office climate which is relaxed, informal, and comfortable?
2. Encourage and provide time for group discussion and communication through regular staff meetings and one-on-one discussions?
3. Make sure that objectives and goals are well defined, emphasized, and understood by all team members?

4. Make allowances for airing of disagreements and differing points of view?
5. Encourage open but respectful criticism?
6. Provide an atmosphere where people are free to express their feelings?
7. Coach staff members toward accepting delegated responsibilities?
8. Cause all auxiliaries to take on new tasks and then support them with coaching and encouragement?

To improve delegation the dentist can:

1. Forget the fallacy frequently taught in dental school, "If you want something done right, do it yourself."
2. Classify responsibilities and tasks for delegation:
 - a. Can be done by an untrained person
 - b. Can be done by a person with some training
 - c. Can be done by a well-trained, experienced person
 - d. Can be done by the dentist only
3. Train auxiliaries; trust; turn loose.
4. Be available to counsel rather than to direct. When a staff member comes to ask a question, answer with a question, "What do YOU think should be done in this situation?"
5. Critique individual auxiliaries privately so that she or he understands your expectations and how to handle particular situations correctly the next time.
6. When a staff member accepts delegated tasks, praise frequently.