EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN A DENTAL PRACTICE
This handy booklet contains articles by leading industry experts packed with practical tips and advice to get you thinking about...

**EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP OF A DENTAL PRACTICE**

**WHAT YOU’LL DISCOVER**

- Keep calm and lead from the front
  - The *difference between leadership and management*, plus how to be better at both
  - *Would you follow you?*
  - The *importance of good leadership* in the pursuit of creating a successful dental practice

- *Share, care and communicate*

- *Seven key responsibilities* for the dental team leader
What makes a great leader of a dental practice?

Leadership and management are delicate arts that require subtlety and skill. They can mystify and frustrate in equal measure. Some people just ‘have it’ - they possess the ability to lead or manage, or in special cases - both! But what is it they possess? What is the difference between leadership and management? But more importantly, how can you become better at both?

by Ashley Latter
A great way of starting to think about your leadership approach is to do a simple exercise; think of a leader who you admire in business and list that person’s qualities. When I run this exercise on my programmes, many people select Richard Branson and come up with a list which includes charisma, personable, shows empathy, good listener, outstanding communicator, positive attitude, shows a genuine interest and the list goes on. Very rarely does product knowledge appear on the list. You can be an outstanding clinician, but it does not necessarily make you a great leader. If you look at the above list, then you can safely say they are just as important for a leader of a dental practice as well.

A successful leader of a dental practice not only needs to have outstanding clinical skills, but also needs to demonstrate world-class leadership and that is where the problem lies. From my experience of training dentists over the last 16 years, most training income is spent developing clinical skills, but very rarely is money spent on developing leadership and the soft skills of communication and managing people.

**So what is leadership and what is the difference between leadership and management?**

In a nutshell, the difference between leadership and management is:

- **Leadership** is setting a new direction or vision for a group that they follow, i.e. a leader is the spearhead for that new direction.
- **Management** controls or directs people/resources in a group according to principles or values that have already been established.

The difference between leadership and management can be illustrated by considering what happens when you have one without the other.

Let’s say we take Leadership without Management. The leader sets a direction and creates a powerful vision but does not consider how the new direction is going to be achieved. Other people then have to work hard in the trail that is left behind, picking up the pieces and trying to make it work.

Management controls resources and manages the status quo to ensure things happen according to already-established plans. E.g. a referee manages a sports game but does not usually provide ‘leadership’ because there is no new change, no new direction - the referee is controlling resources to ensure that the laws of the game are followed and the status quo is maintained.

When you have leadership combined with management, then you’ve hit the bullseye. You get a new direction and vision and you also have the management of the resources and people to make it happen. One without the other, and it’s bound for failure.

Often, over dinner with clients, I get asked what are the most important attributes a leader can possess.

In my opinion, one of the important traits of leadership is getting the best out of your team. I see many leaders who think that people come to their work and the most important thing to them is the money. Money is a very important factor, however, once a person has had a pay rise, the benefits only last one month once they have seen the difference in their pay cheque. People come to work for other things as well.

For example, most people want to be involved in interesting work, being involved in decision-making, being part of something special. Of course, everyone wants a pat on the back for doing a good job, we all crave appreciation. You might throw away a salary slip but you will never throw away a thank you card from the boss.

So if you concentrate on what your staff want, then you will not only meet their needs, but your needs will also be met as well, as your team will go the extra mile for you to help reach your goals. In 1936 Dale Carnegie wrote a book called *How to Win Friends and Influence People* and in it there are 36 human relations principles on dealing with and getting the best out of your people. Although it was written over 75 years ago, it is still as relevant today as it was then. If you follow these principles, you will not go wrong as a leader.

When I am working with my clients on strategy I strongly suggest that they hold regular team meetings with their team, listen to their ideas and take them on board. Your team have loads of ideas in their heads; they are just waiting to be asked. A recent example of this was a specialist client of mine from Glasgow who wanted to make changes in the way the reception answered the telephone and also abandon the idea of having an answer machine in the practice.

Rather than telling the team they were going to abandon the answer machine, he arranged a team meeting and asked the team for their thoughts. By the end of the meeting, not only had the team decided that they would not put the answer machine on anymore, but they came up with the staff rota to cover the telephones for the next three months. Because it was all their idea, the new change happened.

That is true leadership in action (or manipulation?) 🤔

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**To summarise**

1. Develop a powerful vision and share it with your team.
2. Get them involved in day-to-day decision making and ensure as much as possible that your team are involved in interesting work.
3. Listen attentively to their ideas - people will always run with their own ideas rather than yours. Nobody likes to be told what to do.
4. Praise your team when they have done good things, people crave appreciation.
5. Arrange on-going team meetings and set goals for your practice.

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Ashley Latter is one of the UK’s leading dental business coaches. He has produced many business CDs and DVDs and he is also the author of ‘Helping patients to say YES’ and ‘How to communicate effectively and create the perfect patient journey in your dental practice.’

You can find out more about Ashley at [www.ashleylatter.com](http://www.ashleylatter.com)
As pressure grows for dental practices to respond to increasing costs and to stay ahead of the growing competition, principals must become more commercially aware. Determining the most appropriate strategy to fulfil financial goals is vital but leading teams to achieve it is imperative. The success or failure of your leadership skills is reflected in your results.

The only way to achieve your strategic goals is to harness the team in pursuit of your vision. A culture that fails to galvanise the entire team risks a negative impact on performance. As the head of your business there is an expectation that you will lead your team to success.

**TIP:** Be honest in your appraisal of your leadership skills. You’re the principal dentist, the business owner and the assumed leader of your organisation, but can you answer a definitive yes to the following fundamental leadership questions?

- Do you have a compelling vision of where you are leading your dental team?
- Would your dental team be able to articulate your vision?
- Can you determine a strategy that delivers your vision?
- Are you a leader or a manager? Do you know the difference?
- Can you create a high-performing dental team?

### WHAT DOES LEADERSHIP LOOK LIKE?

Leadership and management have their roots in the church and military with command and control structures where orders are passed down the line. Akin to when I say jump, you say yes sir, how high? But that is not the case today where employee expectations have changed. Now when leaders say jump, they should be prepared to hear the response why should I?

People expect to be led differently than they did even 30 years ago and if you expect your team to follow you because of your position, you may be in for a sad awakening. Leadership and management skills are just that: talents that must be learned and developed.

If you want to achieve better results and harness the strengths of a fully committed, motivated team to deliver your strategic plan, then you need to invest in your leadership and management skills. To be successful you need both: they are the opposite sides of the same coin. There are many definitions of leadership but probably the best one suggests that a leader is someone who has followers. So no matter how good a leader you think you are, if your team are not following, maybe you’re not as good as you think.

**TIP:** Leaders have followers. People follow a compelling vision that is clearly articulated and against which their performance and contribution is regularly reviewed.

### THE CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD LEADERSHIP

Leaders have passion and drive to overcome obstacles. They have strong beliefs and stick close to their values, and in doing so win the...
You may be in for a rude awakening did even 30 years ago and if you expect your people to expect to be led differently than they recognise your own behaviour in any of the following scenarios?

Leaders inspire and have courage. They know it’s not a popularity contest and they use their great communication skills to keep their teams in close pursuit of the target.

Leaders know if they continue to do the same things, they will get the same outcome. Where a different result is required, they will find a new approach that achieves it. In other words, leaders are agents of change!

There always comes a point where the old answers just don’t work any more making change inevitable. A key element of leadership is change: change doesn’t happen without leadership. One of the best-known business gurus, Peter Drucker said, ‘Leadership is about doing the right things. Management is about doing things right’. Leaders determine what needs to be done and managers make certain those things are done well.

Leaders set a compelling vision for teams to pursue

Leadership begins with a captivating vision. You have to know where you are heading before you can ask other people to follow. And your vision needs to be captivating enough that people will want to follow you in its pursuit.

As the leader, you set the direction. In the absence of any strategy, people may try to do their best but the interpretation of the role and its output is open to question. Team members who are pulling in opposing directions will create a fractious culture where outputs are less efficient and effective. Your job as leader is to communicate your vision and provide a plan for its achievement whilst illustrating how team members’ contributions are crucial to its success. A united team focused on a common goal is what you are aiming to accomplish.

Once you know where you’re heading, you can identify the gap between where you are currently and where you want to be (your vision) and that sets your priorities and helps determine the right things to measure.

Leaders make decisions and take action

To run your dental practice differently you have to run your brain differently. You have to get better at making decisions and then more importantly, putting them into action. A decision is not actually a decision until it has been enacted. Making the right decisions is not a simple matter. For some, making any decision is a challenge. Do you recognise your own behaviour in any of the following scenarios?

- You’re not afraid to make decisions, in fact you make them all the time. You just don’t follow them through into action.
- You dither and delay about making decisions but did you know that not making a decision is a decision in itself?
- You fire off decisions every day. And they change so frequently that no-one takes much notice.
- You make decisions but they are the wrong ones!

Try improving your decision-making skills by using tried and tested business planning techniques, improving your interpretation of business information or using the services of someone who can help.

Leaders give feedback on performance

Making it happen

So we have a vision for how we would like the practice to look in three years. We have undertaken some scenario analysis and determined the best strategy from several available to us. Our chosen strategy underpins our vision so its pursuit is essential to our success. We have articulated our vision and strategy to the team so it is time to drive through the necessary changes and monitor our performance to ensure success.

We now need to set up some performance measures or key drivers (often called key performance indicators (KPIs)) that act as an early warning system so that as soon as our results go off track, we are alerted and can take corrective action. In addition to measuring the fundamental drivers of your business plan, we must get the whole team on the bus. Ideally we should be undertaking monthly one to ones with every team member to ensure they have the skills and attitude to help you deliver the plan.

Are they clear about your expectations? Evaluate their contribution: what could they do better? Are there obstacles in the way of their success that management should look to remove? The reviews reinforce the direction and ensure management maintains accurate feedback about what is and isn’t on track.

Leaders can be created, which is great news for anyone who currently believes their leadership skills are lacking. Making decisions, taking action and communicating effectively underpin good leadership. Hopefully this article will challenge your thinking and encourage you to take the first step to running your brain and your business differently.

For more information about Andy, visit www.spoton-businessplanning.co.uk
Nearly ten years later, I was at a garage in Bristol when I heard a deep male voice calling out across the forecourt ‘Share, Care, Communicate’ in a very poor and exaggerated Liverpool accent! I turned and saw a vaguely familiar face who, in the conversation that ensued, revealed he had been a delegate at that Vocational Training Conference in Devon ten years earlier and had not only remembered the catchphrase for the ‘Three Ingredients of Teamwork’, but had, as a result, been actively implementing the ‘7 Responsibilities of the Team Leader’ in the dental practice he now owned.

The simple, common-sense guidelines were working for him. Because he understood the principles, all he needed was the reference card of the 7 Responsibilities to refer to. He was proof that being an effective leader in a dental practice is easy.

Even in this case for a Vocational Trainer who, during the conference had taken full advantage of the ‘social opportunities’ presented and could remember little from the formal sessions apart from the words ‘Share, Care, Communicate’ and, most importantly, what the words represented…

ALL members of the practice team have a common understanding of, and accept responsibility for, our objectives and what WE are trying to achieve in OUR community at the moment - our ‘SHARED Objectives’.

You can’t have effective teamwork if team members are pulling in different directions or just turn up to ‘do a day’s work for a day’s pay’ without CARING why!

Team members must care for their colleagues, for their patients… for their practice – take ‘ownership’. It is a human instinct to be motivated and fulfilled by ‘ownership’ – my town, my school, my workplace, my practice.

We only live once and spend a huge percentage of that life working. So if we dislike our job, then our whole life fulfilment is diluted. But, on the other hand, even if the ‘process’ of the job isn’t much fun, if we feel respected and valued and if, even when the pressure is on as it often is in a busy dental practice, the team pull together with camaraderie and mutual respect, then we can all feel pride and satisfaction.

These principles apply to any job, by the way; no matter how ‘horrible’ or ‘lowly’ a role it might be, it is possible to feel valued. It’s all about leadership.

Self-analysis time…honestly… do all who work in your practice feel ownership, valued, respected, pride in their contribution and pride in their practice?

It’s all about Share, Care and Communicate and LEADERSHIP.
The 7 Responsibilities of The Dental Team Leader

Follow these guidelines and ‘Share, Care and Communicate’ will be easy. And remember, any type of leader will benefit – from senior nurse to practice managers and dentists.

Please note, the responsibilities below are described in full in my book ‘Leadership in the Dental Practice’ and presented as an easy reference in a ‘reflective checklist’ card summarising the ACTIONS needed to be taken to deliver each responsibility.

In Summary the responsibilities are...

Create and Communicate Shared Objectives
Continuously reflect on the practice objectives and current priorities and ensure all team members understand and are on board with them – pulling together.

Communicate progress towards shared objectives
Monitor and regularly summarise progress – it is a human instinct to want to know how well WE are doing, for better, OR for worse.

Motivate appropriately - recognise, praise, discipline
Yes ‘discipline’ – because ‘motivation’ is not about keeping people happy – it is about ‘pressing the right buttons’ to make people do the right things in the right way. So treat everyone as the different individual they are and seek to know the right buttons to press for them!

Achieve a balance between task, team and individual
The task (what needs to be done, often urgently), will always be at the forefront, but don’t sacrifice teamwork and developing individuals for short-term results. Closing the practice for training will have a negative short-term effect on the ‘task’, but positive longer term effects. And always consider possible ‘side effects’ of planned actions, e.g. congratulating one team member might be seen as favouritism or make another jealous!

Ensure individuals know their values as contributors
Continuously treat all team members with genuine respect because their role is important – everyone feels valued.

Ensure individuals know how others contribute
Ensure mutual respect, no ‘cliques’ – no-one feels superior; everyone knows that every role is vitally important.

Consult individuals and the team - respect them
Pay attention to everyone, have empathy for everyone, consult them, LISTEN and be flexible. Apart from the psychological benefits of being consulted, team members might actually know better than you and have some good ideas!

And so...
Some people are ‘natural born leaders’, but most of us are normal people with a responsibility to help and lead others – whether naturally good at it or not and whether we enjoy it or not! But, if we follow common-sense guidelines as in the ‘7 Responsibilities of the Dental Practice Team Leader’, we might find we do get quite good at it and start enjoying it!

For more information about Rick go to www.impetusdentaltraining.co.uk

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