

Empowering the Staff Strengthens the Practice

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Do you want to establish a better structure, now that your practice is growing? Do you need to prevent problems? Would you like to achieve a higher financial goal? How about spending more time with patients and less time with staff or management issues? Empowering your staff to take on more responsibility and improve skills can help you achieve your goals.

If you decide to make this shift the entire practice needs to understand that you are changing and why. Communicate to your staff what your goal is and let them know you expect a learning curve. Being a good leader will help the staff understand their roles and allow them to function more effectively ultimately growing the practice and their life skills. Use the following list to evaluate and begin to develop your skills as a leader. Are you a leader or a boss?

Leaders Build Confidence.....Bosses Create Fear
Leaders Guide PeopleBosses Drive People
Leaders Say “Let’s Do”Bosses Say “Do”
Leaders Rely On ConfidenceBosses Rely On Authority
Leaders Correct MistakesBosses Blame People
Leaders Ask QuestionsBosses Know It All
Leaders Make Work Interesting.....Bosses Make Work Drudgery
Leaders Say “We”Bosses Say “I”

Once you’ve established your management style, you must first take some time to set your own goals for practice growth before you can start the empowering process. Then you can begin to empower staff by clearly defining their roles. Seventy percent (70%) of staff do NOT clearly understand what is expected of them.

- Sit down with each staff member and clearly define their job description. (PEN can provide you with detailed job descriptions for positions in an optometric practice.)
- Establish a priority for each task – daily, weekly, monthly.
- Determine an appropriate job title – make it consistent with the practice image and the true duties required for the position.

Once staff clearly understand what is expected of them they are more likely to achieve to that level.

Train, train and train more...fifty percent (50%) of staff do not feel they truly understand how to perform their duties. They might know what to do, but not why they're doing it; that makes it very hard to make decisions and have credibility with patients.

Set up a mentoring program with more experienced staff, provide monthly internal training programs at your staff meetings, attend PEN classes, and bring in vendors reps to cover product specifics. This outlines a minimum requirement for all staff which should be provided on an ongoing basis. The age old saying, "Staff that needs training the most receives it the least and those that need it the least receive it the most," is, unfortunately, something I see ~~this~~ often in my workshops. Continuing education is required of ~~the~~ doctors, why wouldn't you require it of your staff.

Next, determine a performance objective for each and every staff member. Less than thirty percent (30%) of supervisors have objectives for their staff. Without clear expectations and goals staff will often stop learning or will resort to their own perceived level of performance. Let them know what they're doing well and also let them know if they are not meeting your expectations, do this quickly and clearly.

Use the acronym "SMARTER" to help you remember that performance objectives must follow these guidelines:

SSpecific
M.....Measurable
AAgreement
RRealistic
TTime Defined
EExtra Effort
RRelated

SPECIFIC: The goal will be to increase practice revenue. Don't be vague about your expectation. (PEN has a performance evaluation form that can assist you with establishing goals.)

MEASURABLE: As an example, "increase the revenue by 10%."

AGREEMENT: Discuss this goal at one-on-one meetings with staff members and ask for staff feedback on how to achieve it.

REALISTIC: Make the goal reachable not unreasonable.

TIME: Report progress toward reaching the goal (10% growth) at next month's meeting. Don't expect to reach the goal within the month, simply show progress.

EXTRA EFFORT: Instill in your staff the expectation to exceed patient expectations. If you value your patients and speak of them respectfully, so will your staff. Ask your staff to observe something unique and positive about each patient as they interact with that patient.

RELATED TO PRACTICE GOALS: What are your goals? Most staff members I meet with have no idea. My suggestion is you create a simple statement that relates to the practice, the patients and the staff.

Example: “Our practice will strive to provide the latest in technology and innovation to our patients. Our patients will clearly perceive the difference in care provided by our practice and staff. Our staff will maintain the highest level of competence and constantly pursue new information and technology.”

Once all the details are in place you still need to follow up. Don't assume that once the process is in place you can walk away. Empower your most effective staff member to monitor others and the systems necessary to maintain the level of care and quality you envision.

Finally, remember that a word of encouragement goes a lot further than criticism to elicit desired behavior. Focus on what your staff is doing well and they will strive to exceed your expectation; focus on the negative and that behavior will trickle down to patients.

In studies of employees it was found that praise from a supervisor rated higher on the list of desired rewards than monetary compensation. That's not to say staff doesn't want to be well paid, but no matter what you pay you will lose good staff if you don't praise them. Suggested ratios are four to one (4-1) praise your staff four (4) times for every correction or criticism.

No one ever said management was easy but there are rewards...staff retention, patient satisfaction, and increased practice revenue, along with the personal satisfaction of a job well done. Good luck!