Learning to lead

The way you treat people will have a great effect on your management skills, says Jane Armitage

I was first asked to write an article on leadership when I was taking my practice managers' qualification, and at the time I thought: 'Why? I remember learning the unit, and out of everything I was taught, one thing that has stuck in my mind.

How you treat people can have a major impact on your life and your ability to lead. What the course did teach me was to define this management style, which is so important when you find yourself in a leadership position.

Leadership is an achievement, gained from hard work and dedication. Leaders are developed, each individual leader will have their own views on leading a team, each leading in a different manner. Each style of leadership will have an effect on team morale and your business. So which type of leader are you?

Autocratic
The first aspect that seems to go wrong in dental practices is the flow of information. Some individuals give the impression that they are working for MI5 rather than running and leading a dental practice. Information is given to staff on a 'need to know basis' only. No feedback is given, no praise for good work; however this type of leadership is quick to blame.

Autocratic leadership creates a vacuum. Not only do staff become confused about their duties because they may lack vital data, but a feeling of insecurity could occur because they fear that something negative is happening. The vacuum is filled in two ways. Staff invent their own methods to ensure completion of tasks, or they may prioritise the wrong things out of ignorance. Staff may behave in an aggressive manner with dislike for their leader. Leading a team in this way will encourage staff to be demotivated and uninterested.

Democratic
Leading in this way will produce the best results. The democratic leader will include the team, staff will be motivated as the leader will recognise their achievements and praise accordingly. It never hurts to say a simple thank-you at the end of a session.

This approach will enable the leader to produce feedback without receiving any form of resentment. Staff will have a huge amount of information and often by listening to their ideas, contribute to the smooth running of the practice. Involvement is an important aspect in motivating and developing staff. Staff turnover will be reduced as individuals feel respected and valued. This all provides a better working environment.

Non-interventionist
This type of leader would have no relationship with staff. They would lead in an aggressive manner, but actually achieve very little. Staff morale would be low. No help would be openly offered unless a request was made. No feedback would be given. Leading a team in this manner would have an impact on the practice as staff would be demoralised, no motivation and the workmanship would be poor.

The best solution
Democracy is hard work, to lead in this style means finding a suitable pathway that is agreed by the majority. Good management is a blend of democratic, autocratic and non-interventionist leadership.

About the author

Jane Armitage is currently a practice manager for Thompson & Thomas, and holds a Vocational Assessors award. She is also a BDA Good Practice Assessor, BDA Good Practice Regional Consultant, and has a BDA Certificate of Merit for services in the profession. She has her own company, JA Team Training, offering a practice management consultancy service.