



Helping your associate dentist to reach your practice goals

By Julie Parker

The structures of dental practices have seen substantial changes over the past decade with the introduction of corporate, health fund and multi-practice ownership. However, the structure that employee dentists need in order to be efficient, productive and happy has remained the same.

For workers in any industry to deliver their best performances, the employer has a responsibility to provide workers with all that they need to fulfil their roles successfully. This being the case, I am consistently intrigued by the number of complaints I hear from employee dentists who are not given even basic support in their attempts to perform quality dentistry in their workplace.

I have come across complaints of:

- Cheap and faulty dental supplies;
- Equipment, such as handpieces, that never get repaired;
- Untrained support staff;
- Unfair remuneration packages;
- Out-of-date medicaments;
- Run-down surgeries;
- Constant low-to-no supplies; and
- Team dysfunction.

Expecting an employee dentist to deliver a strong performance in an unsupported workplace is crazy! The smart thing to do is make the necessary adjustments to your practice and give your employee dentists the best chance to succeed.

Creating the right environment

Clarifying your Vision

Sharing the Vision for your practice with employees aligns their collective energy and everyone can move together toward that Vision. Without a clearly articulated Vision, employees will not reach beyond the here and now and practice growth will be a struggle. Just think about a sporting team and the value of embracing a common goal.

A clear and compelling Vision energises employees and creates meaning for their work. The Vision also becomes the foundation of all decision-making and any changes that need to be implemented.

Consumables

The cost of consumables can get out of control quickly if not monitored. When expenses are high, consumables are often an area in which practices reign in spending. However, having the right materials is vital to managing patients treatment effectively.

Ensure that a lack of quality consumables is rarely an issue by implementing the right systems:

- Allocate one person to be in charge of ordering and give he/her a budget to work within. This avoids over-stocking, high delivery costs and unnecessary bulk-orders;

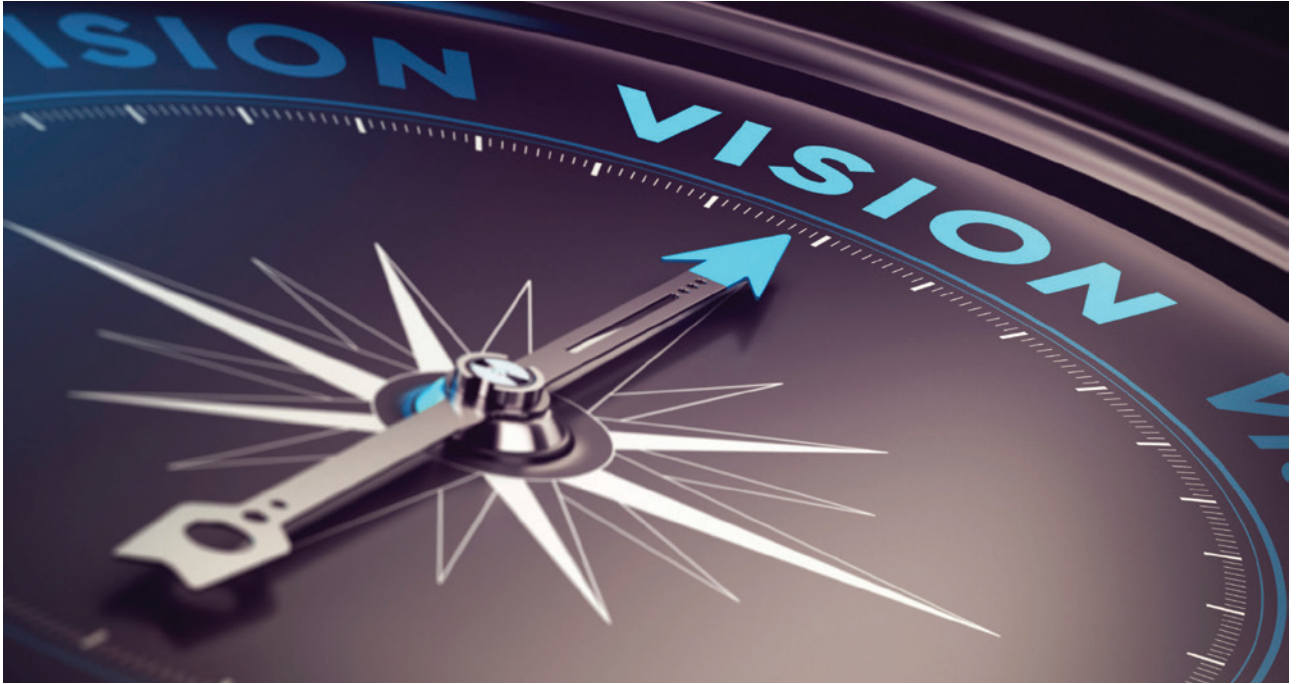
- Ensure your supply cupboard is tidy, where everything can be found so staff don't order items you already have in stock;
- Encourage feedback from staff when introducing a cheaper range of consumables to ensure that once put into use, it is still the better alternative. A simple example of reducing costs to no avail is purchasing cheaper toilet paper, but then using double the amount due to its poor quality; and
- Keep abreast of newer products coming onto the market that will provide better and more long-term results for patients, allowing your employee dentists to continually improve the value of the service they provide. Happier patients result in more referrals!

Systems

Great systems allow for:

- Improved efficiency;
- Improved production; and
- Increased team performance.

There are several key areas of your business that will be served by implementing good systems. Recalling patients, tracking incomplete treatment, surgery changeovers, stock storage and ordering, patient experience, managing new callers to the practice... once you have great systems in place, your employee dentist can start assuring predictable outcomes for patients.



Physical space

The physical space that your employee dentist is working from will either help or hinder his or her efforts to be productive and efficient. Enormous time can be wasted with dental chairs that do not work properly, handpieces that leak water and overhead lights that are too dim. Imagine the frustration and the killing of motivation. Many annoying equipment repairs are cheap to fix. The minute they are noticed, get into the habit of getting the service technician out right away. The money you lose in inefficiency will far outweigh your out-of-pocket expense to get things fixed. Large repairs should be short-listed and planned for swift resolution.

Build a strong team

Working with untrained or unhelpful support staff causes enormous distraction, frustration and inefficiency. It can also have a major impact on the sophistication of the treatment plans employee dentists offer their patients. An employee dentist may be capable of managing complex cases that will contribute largely towards practice production, but will not seek out these cases for fear the results for the patient will be compromised due to the lack of support.

Reception can also be an area that impedes the performance of your employee dentist. Receptionists should be involved in the process of building up employee dentist patient numbers by allocating the appropriate number of new patients to them and conveying to existing patients the value that the employee dentist brings to the practice. Ensuring your team is working to a strong culture and has systems in place that encourages ideas to consistently improve as a team and as a practice will go a long way to create great support for your employee dentist.

Continual training

The more highly trained and experienced your employee dentist is, the stronger his or her performance and therefore contribution to your practice. Encourage their further education and make it easy for them to improve. Including interpersonal communication coaching will see their patient treatment plan conversion rate rise, making the practice more successful.

Getting the best performance from your employee dentist is possible when you give them what they need in order to deliver it. Having an open line of communication will alert you early as to how they are travelling and what you can do to better support them.

About the author

Julie Parker's whole career has been devoted to the dental industry, starting in 1987 as a dental nurse. In 2003, Julie became the first non-dentist to buy a dental practice in Australia. She owned and managed her practice in Brighton, Victoria for 10 years. During this time, she more than trebled the turnover and her staff base grew from 3 to 12 members. Julie successfully cultivated a winning team and a winning business. Her business programs on how to accomplish a dream dental business are gleaned from her wealth of experience, intensive education and an inquisitive business mind. Julie is a Certified Practitioner of Neuro-Linguistic Programming, Time Line Therapy and Hypnotherapy.

Julie Parker Practice Success offers a subscription based program that educates all dental staff in the building and managing of their practices. Members receive monthly audio CD's and workbooks that lead them along the path to personal and team success. All team members, including the dentists, receive Certificates of Completion each month for submission for non-clinical CPD points and inclusion on resumes. Memberships are available for \$395 per month. For more info, see www.julieparkerpracticesuccess.com.au.