



Keeping great staff

By Julie Parker

One of the fundamental elements to your practice success is your team. How to attract a great team and how to tap into the greatness of existing members of your team, are areas that I will be covering in coming articles. This article covers an area that I get asked about a lot: “How do I get my best people to stay?”.

The answer to this is three-fold:

1. Engage staff;
2. Motivate staff; and
3. Show them that you care.

In order to understand how to apply these 3 principles, let’s first look at what drives us as human beings.

We have both **EXTRINSIC** and **INTRINSIC** drivers. The extrinsic drivers tap into our more external desires, such as money, bonuses and rewards. However, it is our intrinsic drivers that many employers fail to acknowledge. It is when our intrinsic drivers are being satisfied that we leap out of bed in the morning, eager to contribute and be productive every day. So you can see how important it is to know what these intrinsic drivers are. This is a well-researched area and the results show that we are driven by three core drivers:

1. Autonomy;
2. Mastery; and
3. Purpose.

Autonomy is being given the opportunity to direct our own actions and behaviours. We take on roles and responsibilities in a much more active and productive way if given the freedom to determine the path taken to complete tasks, the timeline and when to tackle the process. We are born with creative, intuitive minds and we love to exercise these areas.

Although the early stages of developing new skills is challenging at times, overall we love the process of **mastering** what we do. Mastering additional skills is our only path to progress through life and we are engineered to be at our best when we are in this mindset. Tony Robbins, globally-renowned human behaviour expert, puts it beautifully:

“We feel good when we are progressing!”

Discovering a compelling **purpose** or meaning unlocks our deepest motivation. Connecting to a purpose that is bigger than ourselves unleashes passion, productivity and enthusiasm.

Once you have the three intrinsic drivers of autonomy, mastery and purpose as the foundation of how you create the working environment for your practice, let’s now discuss engaging, motivating and caring for your team members.

You may have noticed that money is an **EXTRINSIC** driver. When recognising that it is more important to meet the intrinsic needs of your staff, money is certainly not the be all and end all. In saying this though, money does become the issue in situations where an employee feels they are paid at a much lower amount than what the **FAIR** market rate is. Money need not be an issue if you follow this guide:

- A **basic wage** is one that complies with all minimum rate and entitlements set out in their specific award. The expectation is that the employee will complete all tasks effectively enough;
- A **good wage** is for people who possess the basic abilities and bring even more to their role; more enthusiasm, stronger abilities, longer experience and better people skills; and

“When recognising that it is more important to meet the intrinsic needs of your staff, money is certainly not the be all and end all... but.. ensure you expect of your employees either a basic, good or great performance based upon what you are happy to pay them. If you are paying great rates, expect a great performance. Same is true when you pay basic rates...”

- A **great wage** is for people with extraordinary skills, passion for their roles and who build the business’s success.

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During my observation of dental teams for the past nearly 30 years, there are some key behaviours that I have identified as vital for creating and fostering an environment that does engage, motivate and care for employees. If you implement and maintain the following 10 points, I guarantee you will more successfully keep all of your great employees! I consider that keeping your great employees is a key strategic competitive advantage, particularly as dentistry becomes ever more competitive.

1. Be consistent

Ensure your behaviour and responses to team members are consistent... something they can easily predict. It is very unnerving for team members to display the same behaviour, but to then get variable responses from a boss depending upon mood. Research reveals that employees would prefer to work for a consistently negative boss, rather one that shows inconsistent positivity. Your consistency will build trust and your inconsistency will reduce it.

2. Create the environment for people to be successful

If you want your team members to be successful, you must create the environment for them to be so, by providing the training, support and feedback that they will need in order to meet your expectations. Many times I have seen employers put a new staff member in place and expect them to magically fit in and achieve their goals, without offering any training or adequate direction.

3. Set clear expectations

No-one can read your mind and intentions. Do not expect any expectation to be met, unless it has been clearly stated. Be very specific in what you expect as an outcome, the timeline to achieve this outcome and the desired process. Give ongoing feedback to ensure you are both “on the same page”.

4. Be fair

All too often I have seen employers become disgruntled with a team member because the team member has somehow failed to live up to their expectations, only to realise these expectations were actually quite unreasonable in the first place. For example, expecting team members to respond to work emails outside of working hours, or expecting a “casual” team member to behave as a permanent member. Be fair and reasonable in what you ask and expect of others, honouring the people they are.

5. Align the practice goals with the practice philosophy and values

The values and philosophy of your practice are only powerful if all decisions made within the business are consistent with these principles, including the goals you choose to set from time to time. Both employees and clients will develop faith and trust in your message when your behaviour displays your commitment to your stated values, even if it is going to cost you money!

6. Assure everyone's psychological safety

Providing a caring, supportive environment where team members feel they can rely upon you to watch out for their best interest's means that they won't need to and can relax into their work. You do not want to generate a suspicious or “unsafe” environment.

7. Get things done

There is nothing like an air of progress to generate further progress. Getting things done shows people you are in positive movement. It generates feelings of constant small achievements that feed the motivation in completing the big goals.

8. Have regular “off-the-record” discussions

Often staff will remain silent about underlying issues that can become destructive in the workplace because they don't feel “safe” or “entitled” to raise them. They fear situations like:

- Embarrassing another individual;
- Being seen as a troublemaker;
- Retribution from other team members; and
- Putting themselves “out there” only to have no action taken and they have made themselves vulnerable for no apparent good reason.

I have *always* found it valuable to have regular (once every 3 months or so) one-on-one confidential discussions with each individual team member. A wonderful question to ask each team member is, “If you were the boss, what would you change or implement?”.

9. Embrace “problems”

The purpose of most businesses is the same; to solve problems. Patients have the problem of dental issues and the dental practice solves all the problems that are blocks to getting this job done effectively. Practices will never be problem free, so embrace every issue that comes up as an additional opportunity to become more and more efficient, productive and successful and thereby thrive even more in a competitive dental industry.

10. Celebrate success

We all work hard to achieve our successes. Without celebration, we lose motivation to continually reach higher and higher levels of accomplishment. Setting a goal is a “forward looking” action and often it is the achievement of that goal that motivates many people on the path to it. Celebration will boost the team's morale moving forward to the next challenge!

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 Dental Management 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.julieparkerdentalmanagement.com.au.