

The Five Characteristics of a Great Leader; Learn How to Create, Inspire & Maintain a Culture of Success

There is one critical factor that causes 95% of the dentists after graduating to struggle or even fail? They lack the leadership skills necessary to create a culture of success in their practice. This statistic was obtained after interviewing hundreds of dentists over the past twenty plus years.

The vast numbers of dentists I interviewed graduated from dental school, without attending a single management class. Once they opened their own practice they were expected to be "Practice Management" experts and be equipped with all the qualities and skills of a great business leader. None of us are born with these skills they need to be developed.

There are five characteristics necessary in developing great leader skills. These skills will enable you to create, inspire, and maintain a culture of success in your practice.

1. Know, believe and follow your vision
2. Practice what you preach
3. Communicate and listen daily
4. Set and maintain high standards
5. Inspire and reward daily

Leadership is about knowing, believing and following *your* vision of *your* practice. Your vision is a template of purpose that should be used to initiate, evaluate, and refine all of the activities of your practice. First, you must know who you are by establishing your professional values. What do you stand for? Next, with your well defined vision, set the goals which are so fundamental to the ultimate success of your practice. Every decision you make regarding your practice must be in keeping with your established vision. Continually challenge yourself by asking whether the decisions you make are helping to achieve, or deter from that vision. Once you and your manager know and understand your vision you will be able to make those decisions and manage accordingly. It is necessary to enlist teamwork for success. Discuss your vision with your manager and employees and create an environment where decisions are made by

mutual agreement, not by mandatory protocols dictated to them. It is always easier to follow protocols that are established together.

Leadership is *a/ways* practicing what you preach, it is the day-in day-out operation of the office conducted in accordance with the mutually agreed upon vision. It is extremely difficult to be lead by someone who declares they are committed to something, yet behaves in ways contrary to those commitments. Before long, your employees will lose the respect they initially had for you, as they begin to believe that you have lost respect for them. They will search for another doctor to work for they feel they can respect! Your employees will always positively respond to the safe environment created by this leadership principle.

Leadership is communicating and listening to your staff on a daily basis. You must establish an open door policy in your office. Your employees must always feel you are readily accessible to listen to any concerns they may have, and able to help solve any problems they may encounter. In order to make the right decisions, it is of paramount importance to know your staff; know what is important to them and what is going on in their personal lives. This will create an environment where everyone feels valued and truly cared for.

Leadership is having the courage to set and maintain high standards. To accomplish this everyone must always be held accountable for their actions. Always have a plan of action prior to meeting with an employee to address a concern. This will give you the opportunity to formulate a resolution that is consistent in achieving the vision of your practice. Next, you must meet with your employee and come to a mutual agreement on a course of action to resolve the concern. Steve Chandler, author of 100 Ways to Motivate Other People, wrote if you create agreements with your employees and enter into those agreements on an adult-to-adult basis your employees won't need to be managed anymore. What will be managed is the agreement. In the future, these mutual agreements will make it much easier to discuss and resolve uncomfortable subjects. The end result will be a culture where the quality of the professional is as high as can be expected and where poor performance will not be tolerated.

Leadership is inspiring and rewarding your employees. Your employees will feel inspired if the amount and type of work they do keeps them challenged but not overwhelmed? Start by being aware of and evaluate the daily tasks and responsibilities of each employee to see if they are harmonious with that employee's personal potential and goals. Next, discuss solutions with your employee, value their input and then come to a mutual agreement that coincides with the practice's vision. By enabling your employee's personal potential to be fulfilled, you will create a career versus job mentality in your office. Your employees will be committed to their career and their reputation will be one of high performers and life time members. It is meaningful to communicate verbal rewards to your employees on a daily basis for achieving objectives and goals that promote the vision of the practice. Your employees will respond to positive reinforcement of the desired behavior much faster and more permanently than criticizing poor behavior. Also keep in mind it is only necessary to monitor and reward the outcome not the process used to get there. This style of leadership creates an environment that treats employees like adults and avoids micro-managing.

It is vital that you know how your office measures regarding leadership and continue to monitor regularly. By asking your employees these essential questions you will be able to assess and monitor the leadership of your practice.

1. Do you admire and respect the doctor?
2. Do you admire and respect your manager?
3. How is enthusiasm and morale in your office??
4. Considering the office as a whole, is the compensation system managed equitably and fairly?
5. Does the amount and type of work you have keep you challenged but not overwhelmed?
6. Do you trust management?
7. Are you paid fairly for what you do or contribute to the office?
8. Do employees treat each other and patients with respect?
9. Is management at your office successful in fostering commitment and loyalty?
10. Does your manager communicate with you on a daily basis? If not how often?
11. Is this a fun place to work?

12. Are you highly satisfied with your job?

I suggest using this questionnaire as part of your yearly performance review.

In closing, if your desire is to create a culture of success while providing exceptional quality and care to your patients, you need to nurture and empower your employees. In order to accomplish this you need to embody the 5 characteristics of a great leader, which are creating your vision, leading by example, setting and maintaining high standards and inspiring and rewarding your employees on a daily basis? In the process you and your practice will become the great leaders in the industry!

Judy Kay Mausolf is owner of Practice Solutions. Her practice-management company's mission is to create a healthy and balanced work environment by speaking and consulting with dental practices and dental study clubs. For more information on how to develop leadership skills for your practice, improve employee and doctor satisfaction, get higher performance from your employees and reach greater financial success, call 952-435-4355 or e-mail to mausolf@frontiernet.net.