

Do you have a strategy for internal communication?



Pam McKean

By Pam McKean, Director AB Dental Employment Agency

With the rise of social media, communication is now an obsession! It seems that we are constantly updating each other about our own lives, and everyone seems to know everything about everyone else. While the influence of this form of communication is well documented, what is not apparent is the growth of internal communication.

Internal communication is the discipline whereby employers, employees and colleagues share information on a regular basis both written and verbal. Both internal and external communication is equally important to control the day-to-day operations of any practice.

Whether you are just starting to think about how to implement a strategy or have a fine-tuned plan in place, the bottom line is that internal communication will have a direct impact on your bottom line. Effective communication is vital to ensuring that there is mutual understanding between management and staff. It encourages a sense of community and trust with employees, creating a line of sight for them and engaging them to make your practice successful.

Business strategies and goals should be explained so that your staff can align their individual objectives accordingly. This achieves trust and credibility and enables employees to do their jobs better. It also creates a constructive workplace that encourages growth and a common sense of purpose. From all this, there can only be one result: higher levels of performance and better business results.

There are many reasons why internal communication is important but here a few:

- ◆ **Everyone can understand the big picture and how they fit in.** They feel valued, listened to, and like an important part of the team and the practice.
- ◆ **Employees are more productive.** As a result, they contribute more and feel better about their contribution and the practice so they stay on the job and help move the business forward.
- ◆ **Facilitate decision-making:** Participation of the employees in the decision making process not only increases the quality of decision but also ensures the

better implementation of the decision.

- ◆ **Ability to manage staff more effectively.** Communication isn't just tactical anymore; it's about strategy. In this context, leaders are better able to understand employee needs and how to meet those needs to motivate, inspire and engage them.
- ◆ **Managers can keep an ear to the ground.** If you want to attract, create and retain an engaged workforce, you must be committed for the long haul. Building the trust and credibility to keep employees engaged requires effort, but it's worth it. It takes only seconds to lose employee connection and interest.
- ◆ **A culture of communication.** The employee engagement journey is a continuous one. Communication is a continuous process. You must work every day to ask the right questions, answer others appropriately, and communicate openly and honestly with employees. When they see you making that extra effort, they'll do the same.
- ◆ **Source of information:** Competitive information is necessary to survive in the market economy. Only proper communication can supply this kind of information to the right person at the right time.
- ◆ **Proper supervision:** If there is lack of downward and upward internal communication then you may fail to understand the problems of your employees. As a result proper supervision cannot be exercised.
- ◆ **Provides a better service to your patients.** Making sure everyone is up to date of relevant issues means problems can be solved more quickly, creating a better experience for your patients.

Good internal communication should be open and objective and clear, jargon-free, succinct language

It should be regular and consist of a two-way dialogue.

Common causes of poor internal communication

There are many common causes of problems in internal communications

process. Perhaps the most common communication problem is management's assumption that because they are aware of some piece of information, then everyone else is, too. Usually staff isn't aware unless management makes a deliberate attempt to carefully convey information. Just because someone has been a long term employee doesn't automatically mean they know everything that is going on.

The lack of regular management meetings is another, even if that is because you think there may not be anything necessarily pressing to report. You will be surprised to find out that there events going on in your practice that you may not know about. Having communication only when you have something to say becomes a one-way process. Have meetings regardless, if only to establish and affirm the communication that things are of a status that there are no immediate problems.

If your employees feel that they are not informed about what is happening and that their opinions and ideas don't matter, they will lose interest and passion for what they do; and this will make them less productive. If you don't let your employees speak and don't listen to them, the slightest thing can end up in negativity, secrecy and gossip.

If you didn't value internal communication in your practice previously, now is time to do so. The first thing you need is a change in mentality and attitude. The world has become social, so your practice must become social too. It's a positive cultural change to embrace. ◆

Pam McKean is a Director of AB Dental Employment Agency. The company has been in operation for over 15 years. Over the last 10 years AB Dental has grown into one of the country's leading recruitment agencies for the dental industry, servicing all sectors from government, corporate and private practice.

Currently, AB Dental services over 1,200 businesses with recruiting services including supply of temporary, contract and permanent employees. As professional recruiters, AB Dental can manage as much as little of the recruitment process as required, even if only providing advice.

who has had a long term relationship with your practice and who has been in the industry for a long period of time and knows their product well. Establishing a good working relationship with everyone is such an important part of making your business successful.

Throughout the years, I noticed many companies employing people who had degrees in science. This was a fantastic thing to do as these people had a wealth of product knowledge. It's so important for a dentist to know what product they are using. Is it effective for that course of treatment? Is there something else that is better on the market to use? By sometimes not having this knowledge it can have a negative effect on your practice.

Many companies now employ people with a wealth of knowledge not only in the products that they supply you but also different ways that they can help with your business: different ways of ordering, rostering staff, stock control, etc. Many of us dentists, including myself have the theory that if we buy in bulk, we can save money. This could not be more incorrect. The best way to save money is to order what you need. Therefore you are only paying for what you use and you don't

have an abundance of stock sitting in your stock room not being used and going to waste.

Over the years, dentistry along with equipment and products, have changed dramatically. We have seen many companies merge. This has been fantastic as the supply and demand for products has been met. Also, these large companies have also been able to provide training nights for dentists with products and techniques that are available in the dental industry. Also we have seen many dentists travel overseas to gain product knowledge. I'm happy to say that in dealing with these larger companies it has served my practice well. We have learnt so much.

In summary

Take the time to meet with the people who want to supply you with their product. Meet the representative and see what they have to offer your practice, don't just hand them the job. Find out what particular product they specialise in, are they finally the right person for your practice.

Debt

If I had 10c for every time a dentist asked me how you manage both front desk and

business debt, I would be retired by now!

Firstly there should be no debt for reception, not only is it up to the reception to collect the fees but also the dentists. Some tips for reducing the debts. After treatment walk the patient over to reception explaining the treatment that was done and the fees for today. When doing the confirmation call the day before remind the patient to bring their insurance card to the appointment, and that practice policy is payment on the day. In some cases carrying personal debt into the business can be beneficial.

It's also beneficial that when speaking to banks about your business/practice debt and personal debt, find out how this can be a positive to you. How this makes your business grow.

We are still offering limited mentoring for dentists who need advice on setting up a dental practice. ♦

Anyone wanting to learn more can contact the author at hmarget@ebdg.com.au for information and advice on how to add value to their practice.

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