



Read Mary Byers' online column, The Front Desk, in the Members Only section of the CDS Web site—www.cds.org.

Focusing on staff meetings

What do you think of when you hear the words “staff meeting?” Do you think of boredom? Wasting time? A necessary evil? Or do you think about personal growth and development and increased profitability?

Your gut reaction to staff meetings will, in part, determine how effective they can be in your practice. When you're dedicated to excellence in staff meetings, you'll see the results in terms of vitality and profitability in your practice. If you approach staff meetings as a necessary evil, however, you won't likely see the benefits of setting aside time to address four important needs in your practice.

These needs are provision (making sure staff have what they need to do their job); communication (sharing information to increase effectiveness); affirmation (recognizing and acknowledging a job well done); and excellence (how you do what you do together).

Dr. Alan Goldstein, a New York dentist and business coach, sees the value of staff meetings. In fact, according to an article on his Web site (www.coachingpractice.com) titled, “The Staff Meeting Centered Workplace,” his investment in staff meetings is

substantial. He writes:

Measured in terms of lost production time and staff salaries, it is well over one hundred thousand dollars a year. We hold two one-hour staff meetings per week and have done so for the past eight years. There is good value here. We have experienced double-digit growth each year. . . our ongoing staff meetings are undeniably a major force in the overall growth of the practice.

Is it really possible for \$100,000 in lost production time and staff salaries to fuel the growth of a dental practice? It is if you follow these guidelines, some of which are provided by Dr. Goldstein.

Designate a specific day and time for your meeting.

Notes Dr. Goldstein, “It is not our lunchtime, nor some-

thing we squeeze in.” Because of this, says Dr. Goldstein, “It has a kind of reverential quality for the entire staff.” Setting aside specific time makes it clear to staff that the business of the meeting is important to the practice.

Be punctual. Start on time and end on time—even if it means shortening a patient appointment or interrupting a conversation. This, too, telegraphs to staff the importance of the meeting.

Don't allow interruptions. Let voicemail pick up any calls that come in to the office during your meeting time. Be sure to customize the message callers hear so that they know you are in a staff meeting and will return their call at a specific time. A “no interruptions” policy allows you to keep the meeting moving and maximize your effectiveness.

No titles, no privileges. Dr. Goldstein recommends that you leave your title and your privileges as a doctor at the door. He shares, “In the beginning your staff will not believe that you are relinquishing rank, even for an hour, but over time, as trust grows, they will believe you and an extraordinary openness will develop. It is quite wonderful but it can't happen in a boss/worker setting.”

No hanging back, no monopolizing. Participation is not optional in the staff meetings in Dr. Goldstein's practice, nor is monopolizing the conversation. Because people support what they help create, it's essential that all staff members contribute—and that none dominate the meeting. It's the facilitator's job to insure this happens. Dr. Goldstein facilitates the meetings once a week and rotates the task among all staff members for the second meeting of the week. Doing so allows “each staff member to experience the difficulties, rewards and satisfaction of leadership,” according to Dr. Goldstein.

As a consultant, I see an uncanny connection between organizational ineffectiveness and lack of staff meetings. If your practice is faltering, fizzling or downright failing, I urge you to take a look at your staff meetings and to focus on making them more effective. It's one of the most profitable things you can do to affect your bottom line and insure your staff is challenged and living up to their full potential.

Are you up for the challenge? ■

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