



Enhancing teamwork

With the insight I obtained from the Career Assessment Survey results that were published in the July issue of RDH, dental hygienists felt that teamwork is an issue that needs to be improved upon in their work environment. Eighty-seven percent of dental hygienists who responded to the survey worked in a dental office.

All hygienists, especially those who work in a dental office, should ask themselves if they work in collaboration with their employer and coworkers to achieve the goals of the office. If yes, great! However, reflect upon two things. First, why do you work well together as a team? Secondly, are you effective as a team at accomplishing tasks of importance for the office? This is worth thinking about in order to make your workday positive, accomplishing daily tasks, meeting appointment timelines, and making your

patients feel important, comfortable and satisfied at their appointments.

On the other hand, if your dental office is not working as a team, ask yourself why. List the reasons on a piece of paper. Then decide if your office environment can be improved to enhance teamwork. This could be difficult if the relationships you have tried to establish are not reinforced by a collaborative effort through open communication and commitment. Your employer plays the lead role in this task through establishing a vision/mission statement for the office, having all employees understand the vision and mission, and the importance of the role that each staff member plays to accomplish the mission statement.

What is a team and what are the qualities of an effective team?

A team is defined as two or more individuals who work together to accomplish a task or performance and whose expertise is required for the attainment of the team goal or the objective and held mutually accountable. Teamwork is the collaborative effort by members of the team to achieve a common goal.¹

Does your office have a vision and mission statement?

Think about how important it is to have vision. You must know where you are going in order to determine the steps necessary to achieve success within your office. As Stephen Covey stated in his book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, "Begin with the end in mind." The vision will provide the direction your office wants to achieve for the future. The mission statement will help to define the way in which the direction will be achieved through objectives and strategies.

There are several important characteristics of an effective team:

- o Team members understand the office vision and mis-

Tell us about your dental hygiene position

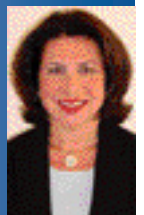
Professional Savvy is attempting to identify dental hygienists who work in the following types of practice settings:

- Dentist/specialist (pedodontic, cosmetic dentistry, periodontist, orthodontist, prosthodontist, or oral maxillofacial surgeon)
- Independent dental hygiene practice
- Or, any position outside of private clinical practice

Please consider responding with the information below, faxing it to (973) 598-0326 mailing it to Professional Savvy, LLC, 6 Augusta Drive, Flanders, NJ 07836, or emailing it to professionalsavvyhd@yahoo.com.

- 1.) Name, address, and telephone number and/or email address
- 2.) Briefly describe your:
 - a.) specialty practice
 - b.) independent practice, or
 - c.) dental hygiene position outside of private clinical practice
- 3.) Indicate the number of years in your current position.

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sion statement and may help to develop it during a team meeting.

- o Team members have a common identity.
- o Team members have common goals and objectives.
- o Team members share common leadership.
- o Team members share successes and failures.
- o Team members cooperate and collaborate.
- o Team members have roles.
- o Team members work to make decisions effectively.
- o Teams are made up of diverse people.³

An effective team works in an environment of mutual respect, trust, and honesty. Team members will need to understand the roles of one another in order to work together to achieve the designated objectives needed to accomplish their goals.

There are four traits that characterize effective teams:

- Commitment to the team — Commitment is recognized when one is a valued member who accomplishes tasks and has developed empowerment as being a part of the team.
- Decisions made by mutual consent of team members — Team members can assist in resolving conflicts by mutually working together to reach consensus. Team members can share opinions to help resolve problems in order to satisfy all members.
- A process defined for managing conflict and creativ-

ity — Any team will encounter conflict throughout the duration of the team's existence. Conflict can be resolved through creativity and discussion by the team members.

- A process defined for effective decision-making procedures — When a process is defined for effective discussion and decision-making, the team can work together to accomplish their tasks and objectives to achieve their office goals.³

Teams can benefit dental offices by increasing productivity, increasing patient satisfaction, increasing employee morale, and reducing overhead. Productivity can be improved through enhanced work methods and procedures that improve efficiency, rate of output, and quality of service to the patients. Effective teams can help to increase patient satisfaction by being on time, being patient and understanding of the patients' needs, having adequate time to complete preventative procedures, and giving product recommendations.

Team members can help support creativity, satisfaction, and a rewarding work environment through positive attitudes, an open relationship with the employer and other team members, commitment to making a positive difference in treating patients, and effective resolution of conflict to accomplish tasks efficiently. Employee turnover will be reduced if team members are satisfied in their

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How is a team developed?

If you do not have a team implemented within your dental office, then consider the following to begin the team development process:

- Implementation stage — The employer develops a vision and mission statement annually to define the goal(s) to be achieved. This stage defines the employer's support, commitment, and recognition to the team members of the office to help accomplish the office mission statement.

- Clarification stage — It is necessary to establish the roles and responsibilities of team members in order to achieve the goals set forth in the mission statement. The office manual is a procedural manual that is essential in maintaining an efficient and cooperative work environment.

The office manual could include the practice philosophy or vision, define the office mission statement, and define job responsibilities for team members. The office manual should be written under the direction of the employer; however, team members should contribute equally to the development of the manual to provide a total team effort.

The office manual can include the following sections: statement of the purpose/goal of the manual; the office mission statement; identification of team

members; roles/responsibilities of team members; office communication and team meetings; team member policies; employment policies (benefits, salary schedule); office records; clinical procedures performed; inventory systems/team members responsible; dental hygiene recall procedures; training of team members; continuing education course attendance; and professional organization memberships.

- Leadership stage — Many employers may determine team leaders of specific groups depending on their personalities, leadership skills within the office, and willingness to take on responsibility.

- Collaboration and consolidation — Team members work together to solve problems. Employers will provide the support and guidance to team members to problem-solve and implement decision-making procedures. Performance feedback is helpful to team members to determine accomplishments.

- Continuation stage - Teams are part of the day-to-day operations of the dental office.

Training is conducted on an ongoing basis, as well as education for new procedures or products. Team members must attend continuing education programs for relicensure and develop team members' skills within the dental office.⁴

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dental office environment.

If overhead is reduced, there should be an increase in the bottom line. Many tasks assigned to individual staff members may be assigned to the team, thereby decreasing overhead. Teams can be a benefit to individuals working in the dental office by making work less stressful, sharing responsibility, enhancing the self-worth of team members, sharing rewards and recognition, influencing one another, and experiencing a sense of accomplishment.³

In closing, a few final thoughts to consider in enhancing your role as a team player in the dental office:

- * Have respect for your position in the dental hygiene profession.

- * Become a member of your professional association, the American Dental Hygienists' Association.

- * Understand the importance of your role and responsibilities in the dental office.

- * Conduct your responsibilities efficiently and effectively.

- * Be dependable.

- * Respect your employer, coworkers, and patients.

- * Have a positive attitude, which will enhance your relationships at work and make your day more pleasant and enjoyable.

References

1 American Heritage Dictionary online, 2004.

2 Covey, Stephen. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. New York, Free Press, 1989, 145-150.

3 Spiegel, Jerry and Cresencio, Torres. *Manager's Official Guide to Team Working*. California, Pfeiffer & Company, 1994, 5-6, 7-8, 10-12.

4 Ludden, LaVerne, and Tom Capozzoli. *Supervisor Savvy*. Indiana, Jist Publishing, 1994, 191-194.