

VIEWPOINT

Eileen Morrissey, RDH, MS



*Just
one
of the
gang!*

As a consultant, I am often in contact with doctors who are confronted with all types of management issues. Their relationships with employees are frequently out of sync, which can be an ongoing source of frustration. I want to share one potentially helpful strategy with doctors who may find themselves in similar situations. File this one in the category, “Little Things That Make a Difference.”

As background, once a week, for eight hours, I remove my consulting hat and replace it with that of a clinical RDH. I’m a hygienist in a local dental practice, an office that I joined last October.

What I noticed almost immediately about my boss, Dr. Dave Fishberg, was that he appeared to have a solid rapport with all his staff members. One of the reasons for this rapport is the way he interacts with us. For example, if we gals go to the local café for lunch, Dave walks over and links up with us. If the staff eats in, he pulls up a chair and joins the party. Conversation is informal, usually having nothing to do with work, irreverent, and occasionally gossipy.

In short, it’s a blast, because Dave is one of the funniest doctors I have been privileged to work with. Although I’ve only been there a couple of months, I feel like I’ve known him a life-

time, and I attribute that to the manner in which he goes about establishing this “connection” with his team.

In contrast, most doctors I have worked for — or consulted with — make a quick beeline away from their staff once the lunch hour arrives. Many use the time to “catch up” on whatever it is that needs doing. Several have confessed to me that they really look forward to their hour of solitude (assuming they can take it, given scheduling demands). After having spent a busy morning with staff, and knowing that the afternoon holds more of the same, they want nothing more than to be by themselves, perhaps escaping from the office altogether.

I can appreciate that, yet I think that doctors have to realize that staying away does nothing to lessen any distance between you and your employees. I understand that you need *your* time — your very sanity depends upon it! However, I watch Dr. Fishberg, who is every bit as busy as you are. He doesn’t join the staff for lunch daily, but I see him make the effort to do so at least *once each week* ... and it pays off in his relationships!

When an employer breaks bread with his employees, it provides an opportunity for them to spend time together under more relaxed circum-

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-stances. If he or she does this on a regular basis, a dynamic for positive rapport emerges. When the only contact that you have with your staff is “shop talk” between the hours of 9 and 5, you are missing an opportunity to get to know a different side of them, and for them to see another side of you. In the long run, this makes your communication with them on *any* issues more challenging. I’m not saying it’s impossible to establish a good rapport if you don’t do this, but I am saying that I have seen it make a difference in Dr. Fishberg’s practice. Hosting an annual holiday party for the staff is nice, but it’s not going to cut it in and of itself.

The staff at one of my consulting offices “opened up” at a team meeting and revealed how they missed their doctor taking them to lunch once a week. It wasn’t having their lunch paid for once a week that bothered them. It was the fact that they no longer had time with their leader away from dentistry. Doc

was spending his lunch hour on the Internet. He had no idea that his absence was creating such a void. When he found out, he vowed to correct it.

If you are a doctor who has never joined your staff for lunch, how do you join in “all of a sudden?” Your participation doesn’t have to be awkward. Just tell your staff members that you would like to start taking them to lunch once a week. Or, tell them that you’d like to order in and eat together. They probably realize better than you do that the hectic frenzy of the office routine leaves little or no time for small talk.

Management is challenging. I know that many of you wish that you could simply do the dentistry you love to do, and not have to deal with personnel issues. However, as long as employees factor into your practice scenario, taking a step to become closer to your team will produce positive results in a multitude of ways. Try this food for thought on your next lunch hour.

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DENTAL SCHOOLS TALK BACK

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of his students will be using laptops. The University of the Pacific also uses electronic medical charts and will begin using digital radiographs in July as well.

Dr. Chapman said that TransLab™ offers “... very good reinforcement of what the student is taught in the classroom,” but it “... cannot adequately address certain aspects of the aesthetic considerations...” mentioned previously.

Dr. King believes the rate-limiting factor that prevents going all digital “... is still the case model. We are very proficient in impression techniques. Once we can satisfactorily accomplish this through three-dimensional configurations and an electronic transmission with all of the customized characteristics included, we can do digital communications with our labs.”

Take a look at our summary table of interview highlights for additional insight.

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COMPUTERIZED SCHEDULING

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try a seminar. Additional training can take you to the next level of expertise. Remember, if you “always do what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you’ve always got.”

Picture this. You are at the front desk and you’ve just scheduled hygiene and treatment appointments for a patient. You have collected payment and printed a receipt, as well as an appointment card.

As you wave goodbye, the phone rings. The patient on the line wishes to reschedule her appointment, and you are able to accommodate her with a simple click and drag.

Meanwhile, the doctor’s assistant has entered a new patient’s treatment plan into the computer. You quickly

bring up the treatment plan in your e-Book and are able to locate and offer to the new patient a number of different dates for major procedures.

Your other line rings, and an office team member answers the phone for you. It is another patient seeking an appointment. As the office team member brings up the patient on your e-Book, all of your notes on the patient’s appointment needs appear so that your team member knows exactly what and where to schedule. You finish with your new patient, check your production goals for the week, and sigh with a deep feeling of satisfaction.

Leave the dental profession? Not as long as you can schedule electronically.

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