



Are you suffocating?

Simon Reynolds discusses how successful delegation can give you more breathing space

I think we can all agree that becoming a dental practice owner is an exciting but huge task that leaves you with a lot more on your plate than you had when you were an associate. The great news is that you're now a business owner as well as a dental professional; the more challenging news is that you now have two roles to juggle, both of which require a lot of time and effort from you.

This is where that feeling of suffocation can start to worm its way in if you don't utilise your team effectively. With so much to do and only so many hours in the day, it can often feel as though you're drowning in the myriad of tasks that need to be completed to ensure things like staff wages are paid on time, that your practice is up to speed with the ever-increasing compliance tasks, your staff rotas are up to date, admin tasks are completed...oh and at some point there's some dentistry to do, too!

What can you do about it? Well, the first thing is to understand that it is simply impossible to try to do it all. I'm not a practice owner, but at times in my career I have certainly felt overwhelmed in the past when I have fallen foul of trying to do everything myself. This is a huge learning curve and one that taught me to recognise that the help of your team members is crucial to the successful running of any business for the long term. At times we all think that it is just easier to do something ourselves rather than delegate it to someone else. Be honest, how many times have you added a job to your 'to do' list only to see that list grow longer and longer with items never quite being fulfilled? I know I have!

The art of delegation

This is where the art of delegating comes into play. I say 'art', because that's exactly what it is. Not only is it often difficult to allow ourselves to let go of tasks, there is also knowing which jobs to give out, and to which team member.

The first rule is that delegating does not mean passing off all of the jobs you hate, the chances are that no one else wants to do these either. Instead, look at your team and their varying skills and work out who would be best placed to take on which tasks. Leveraging each person's strengths will be of great advantage, as it will help you not only get things done, but also get them done well. Bear in mind that some of your business processes or tasks may be commercially sensitive or require certain clinical

skills, so you need to be careful when selecting who you give these types of tasks to, as they may need particular qualifications or be trusted to deal with such info.

The next thing to bear in mind is that you are not limited by the skill set of your existing team; there are so many options available these days for outsourcing. There are plenty of specialist firms or freelancers who can carry out your HR, IT, marketing etc. So shop around for services like these, they'll often be less costly than you might expect and can free up valuable time for you and your team.

Example

One great area of practice life where you can delegate some responsibility is with your dental plan. This person could effectively take ownership of managing your plan alongside the support of your plan provider, ensuring your plan reconciliation is properly completed each month so that your practice always has a good insight into your new and cancelled patients, as well as any trends that may be appearing. Alongside this, they can check progress against any targets you may have in place, ensure the rest of the team are fully trained on communicating plan benefits to patients and promoting your plans – especially new starters – and take charge of making sure that a defined patient journey is followed when it comes to introducing your plans to patients.

On your 'to do' list, you may have simply written down something like 'dental plan growth', but when it is broken down as above you can see that this area of your practice has massive potential if managed correctly. Passing a responsibility such as this on to a team member who can take ownership of it will not only give your practice a great boost, it will also empower that staff member within their role. Showing trust like this can make employees feel rewarded and unrestricted in their roles, which can help with staff retention.

Things to bear in mind

An important thing to remember is that there is almost always more than one way of reaching an objective. This is vital and I can't stress this point enough. Just because someone isn't doing a task in the same way that you might, it doesn't mean it won't be carried out properly or effectively. Dare I say it, their way may even be better

than yours. Once you have delegated, clearly explain what needs to be done and what is expected of the task, ascertain whether any training is required and show your support by being available to answer questions and provide help during the learning phase. After this, leave that individual to get on with it; allowing yourself to get caught up in micromanaging people and checking up on their every action will leave you wasting more of your time.

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Finally, in some cases, things may go awry. In these circumstances, keep your cool, offer constructive feedback, and work together to put processes in place to ensure the same doesn't happen again. When things go wrong, there is very little point in blowing your top, all this achieves is creating a negative atmosphere and a culture where your team will feel nervous to take on new tasks. We all learn from our mistakes, it's an important part of progressing in life. Working together to put things right will allow you all to develop together as a harmonious team for the benefit of your dental practice. **D**



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