

Successfully Managing Your Staff: 3 Keys to Unlocking Your Success

Presented by the
American Society of
Cosmetic Dermatology
& Aesthetic Surgery

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When I receive a compliment on how efficiently my office runs, I am immediately thankful for the team I have at Trillium Creek. A leader is only as good as his or her surrounding cast. My practice is successful because I have built an A-team around me in which every member is an expert in his or her area. As a dermatologist, my expertise is in practicing medicine and not in managing my practice. After trying to do both, I realized that my strengths are in diagnosing and treating my patients to the best of my ability. Hence, when I started experiencing the benefits of playing upon my strengths, the stress associated with everyday management issues slowly dissolved. I became a coach and a mentor to my peers, nurses, and medical assistants, which was mutually rewarding.

How did I make the leap from managing my dermatology practice to becoming a mentor and a coach? Looking back at the transition, there were 3 keys that unlocked the door to success. The first key was creating structure.

Creating Structure

The first step I took toward creating structure was selecting the individuals who would become my A-team. I put together an organizational chart that outlined my A-team members and the positions that they would fill. My general manager would excel in day-to-day management and operations, my accountant would be an expert in financial analysis, and my executive coordinator would be very detail oriented and excellent at multitasking. With my

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A-team in place, the members learned the appropriate reporting protocols and worked in their areas of expertise toward the common goal of growing and developing the practice.

Every successful company has planned for its success by developing a road map to create structure. The road map becomes a toolkit for the practice and should include all of the essential tools needed to ensure success. These tools are utilized by the members of the A-team, specifically supervisors and managers, who need to be trained on all of the tools in the kit and contribute to adding new tools as well.

One of the great benefits of toolkit training for your supervisors and managers is consistency. Every team member should be on the same page and know how to handle any situation that may arise. The step-by-step guides in the toolkit should walk the team through various scenarios, such as conducting an interview, conducting a performance review, and coaching and counseling an employee. The tools and training materials included

General Outline of a Toolkit¹

- New-hire checklists
- Tips for new employees
- Guidelines on coaching and leadership
- Evaluation and satisfaction surveys
- Interviewing guidelines
- Job descriptions
- Performance review guidelines
- General practice management forms
- Employee handbook

PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

in the kit should help the team effectively manage and coach their employees to become great leaders (Table).¹

Communication

Once my A-team was in place and we had developed our plan for success, we needed to communicate that plan to the entire practice. How did we ensure that everyone within the practice understood the goals of the practice and how they were going to be achieved? We accomplished this by scheduling department meetings, organizational meetings, and performance reviews.

Department Meetings

Every supervisor in his or her respective department is responsible for communicating to that department any changes, updates, and strategic planning policies. Our practice has a department meeting one to two times every month. This is also an opportunity for the supervisor to congratulate and recognize the department for any job well done as well as an opportunity to hear feedback from team members.

Organizational Meetings

Once a month we have our Trillium Creek “Brains and Breakfast” meeting. The entire practice meets to review updates, marketing campaigns, new procedures, service, or retail offerings as well as learn more about our practice and the field of dermatology. To reward the practice for listening and learning, employees are broken up into teams to play *Jeopardy!* using dermatology-related questions. The winning team receives “boutique bucks,” available certificates that employees can use for a retail purchase made in our boutique. They are available in increments of \$2, \$5, and \$10. We also recognize the employee of the month at this meeting.

Performance Reviews

Another excellent way to communicate with employees and team members is through performance reviews. This is an opportunity to let employees know how they are doing. This is very important for new hires, who have a steeper learning curve and therefore should be reviewed at 30-day and 90-day intervals. The 30-day review allows an opportunity to proactively address any issues that have arisen. All other reviews should be conducted every 6 months. Communication and

feedback between management and employees are essential for success, and performing reviews on a 6-month basis provides this opportunity.

Creating a Positive Work Environment: A Home Away From Home

When adding up all of the waking hours spent at work versus those spent at home, more time is spent at work. Therefore, creating a positive work environment is crucial for success and can be the most enjoyable and rewarding key to develop.

Employees should be rewarded for a job well done. I reward my employees on the spot with boutique bucks. All managers and supervisors on my team have been empowered to reward their staff with boutique bucks when they see an employee providing exemplary customer service. On the other hand, if an employee is not performing up to standards, they are given an opportunity to improve by being coached and provided with the tools necessary for improvement.

All the members of the team are crucial to the success of the practice. However, sometimes team members suffer setbacks and tragedies. In order to accommodate a member of our team in need, we developed the Trillium Creek Emergency Fund. This fund provides assistance to a team member when tragedy strikes. Money is raised for the fund through employee donations at our annual Christmas party and employee appreciation events for our staff. Employees bake cakes, knit scarves, and donate their talents to help raise money for the fund. Participating in fund-raising builds camaraderie amongst the staff and helps a valuable team member in a time of need.

Summary

Adding just the right amount of the 3 key ingredients will help to create a recipe for successfully managing staff. First, recognize and develop your strengths. As a dermatologist, our strengths lie in providing exceptional medical care. Second, develop a team that excels in managing the business side of the practice. Continually develop the team's skills and provide team members with a framework for success. Finally, communicate goals and help employees reach theirs in the process.

Reference

1. Practice solutions. <http://www.solutionsforpractices.com>. Accessed January 10, 2008. ■