Supportive Team Culture Series: Part 1

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Dentistry has been subject to many rapid changes in recent years. Staffing shortages, increased patient expectations, new technologies, and reimbursement pressures are emerging concerns in dentistry.

Dental teams are under more stress than in previous decades, and the risk of burnout is a real concern. Building a supportive team culture is necessary for practice stability, patient care, and retention.

A supportive team culture is a workplace where individuals feel valued, heard, respected, and empowered. Building this type of environment requires effort from every team member.

Creating a supportive team culture begins with supportive dentists and supervisors. The culture of the workplace is influenced by the managerial style it is run by.

Creating an environment where employees feel safe to voice concerns and ideas provides a psychological sense of safety. When employees feel heard, they are empowered to become more engaged in the workplace.

In addition, mutual respect across all roles is essential. From the front office, assistants, managers, and hygienists to the dentist, a mutual respect is necessary.

Clearly communicating about expectations, protocols, and changes helps to build team trust. Establishing communication channels such as weekly or biweekly huddles can provide all an opportunity for communication.

In addition, making an open-door policy allows for private concerns to be expressed. Try not to lose your message through poor delivery.

Sarita Maybin, communications expert, advises when addressing employees about concerns, to try to avoid using "you" in conversation. Instead try to address issues by using "I" statements, like "I need your help with…" Also do not forget about kindness. Most people will respond positively towards kindness. Without kindness, true collaboration is not possible.

Written role descriptions and protocols can provide a clear outline of office standards and expectations. Update protocols and workflow charts as changes arise and share with all team members. Keeping the team informed is important to allow for good outcomes and ensure consistency and accountability.

Celebrate the good contributions of team members. Team members must feel valued. Acknowledging individuals in the moment is a great way to make a team member feel appreciated. Pointing out patient compliments or a great teamwork day are also positive ways to help build morale.

Implementing structured recognition, such as an employee of the month or quarterly team awards, are also opportunities to point out recognition.

Recognizing emotional labor is also of value to team members. For instance, acknowledging a team member who covers extra shifts or makes extra efforts to maintain cleanliness. A person who manages a challenging patient well also is a good chance to recognize a team member's work. In addition, having regular feedback and support helps to build trust and respect.

Providing opportunities for professional growth helps team members gain a mutual respect and feel greater value in their work.

Team culture is further enhanced by creating a shared purpose. When team members have a shared mission and values, they work towards those goals. The team must feel the sincerity of the goals through leadership for the sentiment to trickle down. Be sure that all goals are not revenue-based.

Goals towards patient care, such as the new patient's experience or goals towards a recall system are ways to streamline the dental office.

Again, there is more opportunity to recognize and appreciate team members when they help to achieve the goals made.

Without a supportive team culture, we risk high turnover rates, lower morale, and decreased productivity. Seek out continuing education to help build your skill set to be all that you can be. More on supportive team culture to be explored in the next issue of our SADDS Journal.

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