How to motivate practice staff

Having highly motivated staff will lead to a better environment at work, improved staff retention and a more efficient workplace

How often have you wished that your staff would go just that little bit further, both for the practice and the client? How often have you heard that you can’t force someone to go the extra mile, that they have got to want to do it for themselves?

It is true – motivation cannot be imposed; it must come from within. But it is also true that practices can create structures that bring out the best in people. If done properly, you too can have staff chomping at the bit willing to stay a little longer at the end of the day to help a client.

Your ideal is a workplace that does well financially, but that is also fun to be a part of, where staff willingly work hard and push themselves further. And with the rise of the corporately owned practice, getting this right gives you a good chance of beating the multiples – after all, people buy people, and a strong service ethic will rub off on your clients.

Offer work that is important and useful

No one wants to go to work and waste their time; everyone wants to feel like they are achieving and doing something useful. Managers of practices, no matter how small, need to create the feeling in staff that their work has a sense of purpose. As a manager, you need to see that every task is necessary. If a task cannot be excised but is dull and offers little satisfaction, you need to either rework it or spread the load around so that everyone – including the management – takes some of the pain. Similarly, you need to find a way of explaining to all that even these tasks have a purpose which eventually leads to the greater good.

You may have heard of the apocryphal story that involved President Kennedy’s visit to NASA in 1962. The story suggests that Kennedy saw a cleaner carrying a broom. He interrupted his tour, walked over to the man and said, “Hi, I’m Jack Kennedy. What are you doing?” “Well, Mr President,” the janitor responded, “I’m helping put a man on the moon.” The point is any job can have purpose – you just need to find and communicate it.

Employ the right staff

Employment law is very prescriptive about the recruitment process and what employers can and cannot do. However, there is nothing to stop you seeking out high achievers (on a non-discriminatory basis), because by definition they will be self-starting, self-motivating and their enthusiasm will rub off and raise the morale of the others.

By extension, the law allows you, through a fair process, to remove those who underperform or who are not team players. If they are not working for the practice, they need to leave before they irreparably infect other employees. Remember – take good legal advice before acting to make sure that you follow the law carefully.

Delegate

You manage, and others do. That is the whole point of having staff and you being a manager. But think about it, no one likes to have their boss looking, watching everything that they are doing. Assuming you have employed people correctly, you ought to be able to delegate tasks and assume that they have been done correctly to your and the client’s satisfaction. It is all about trust – so dole out duties and let them get done; only intervene if there is a problem. You may even find that the employee does the job differently but more efficiently.

Recognise good work

We work for a number of reasons: economic (we need money to exist), social (we crave interaction with others) and reward (we like a sense of belonging and public acknowledgement of good work). Any good manager worth their salt will note that good work and ensure that everyone – onsire or, if the practice is big enough, up the chain – knows of the effort that an individual has expended on behalf of the practice. Do this properly and you will put the employee on cloud nine and their sense of well-being will pass on to others who will want some of the same.