

IN BRIEF

Coaching in the business of dentistry will:

- Increase awareness and responsibility within individuals or teams to enhance performance.
- Allow individuals and teams to define their own training needs and instil a sense of pride.
- Create and clarify a shared vision for teams, helping them or individuals achieve their goals.
- Improve the facets of leadership to the benefit of the individual and the team.
- Improve all aspects of communication leading to clear understanding.

The role of coaching in the business of dentistry

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Coaching is a subject dentistry appears to have let slip by, yet as this article outlines, it has so much to offer in many different aspects of dentistry, but particularly in fulfilling the Standards for dental professionals determined by the General Dental Council (GDC). Evidence suggests that coaching has produced tremendous benefits to business, and dentistry is a business.

What exactly is coaching? These two definitions are useful: 'Coaching is the process that helps people to review, conclude, and plan so that they make fewer mistakes and have more success';¹ and 'Coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximise their own performance. It helps them to learn rather than teaching them'.²

However, when relating coaching to business, a better definition is: 'Coaching helps you turn ordinary conversations with staff into learning opportunities. It also has beneficial effects on their motivation, your relationships with them, and your leadership credibility'.³

Coaching is now firmly established as a way of supporting people and organisations in their quest to achieve what they really want. Many businesses have found how coaching has improved the motivation and performance of the people working for them. Dentistry is a

business; it is now time for dentistry to embrace coaching.

In the past dentistry has set up a series of processes and procedures that the staff have been directed to follow. The staff were treated as a resource in a 'control and command' structure. Sadly, in many cases, this is still the situation today. Modern dental practice requires a team approach.

In the *Standards for dental professionals* produced by the GDC, principle 4 states: 'Co-operate with other members of the dental team and other healthcare colleagues in the interests of the patient'. It also states: 'Co-operate with other team members and colleagues and respect their role ... Treat all team members and other colleagues fairly ... Communicate effectively and share your knowledge and skills with other team members and colleagues'. All these aspects are easily dealt with through coaching.

Consider the *Principles of dental team working*, also produced by the GDC. Under the title 'The dental team', it states: 'Teamwork means working together to provide good quality dental care'. It is employees who generate customer service, product development and creativity, either individually or as a team. This principle needs to be applied to dental

teams. Certainly, teams that are coached can define their own training needs, and, more important, they can create a sense of pride in their business.

There are many different types of team to be found in different organisations, and at different levels within the organisation. In my opinion, many organisations form the wrong kind of teams, or if the right teams, they do not let them develop and perform. Teams are all about change; it is the most consistent thing that teams go through; however, change itself is not the problem, it is how that change is implemented.

Unless a new business is being established, it is not easy to readily form the right team. However, using a coach, who is effectively a change agent, will allow analysis of how the team is to perform, what training is required, and how the changes required are communicated to them so as to overcome the resistance to the change. Anyone creating a new team has to take into consideration the task requirements, individual needs, and group dynamic within the vision, mission and processes involved. All these aspects are within the remit of a coach, along with an understanding of team chemistry and interpersonal style evaluations.

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There are five social stages of team development, moving from managerial control to team control. A coach, again, can have an important role to play in each stage of 'forming', 'storming', 'norming', 'performing', and 'reforming'.

Consider the principles of dental team working under the section 'your individual responsibilities within the team'; it states: 'All members of the dental team ... are individually responsible and accountable for their own actions. This includes your responsibility for co-operating with other team members ... only carry out a task that you have been trained and are competent to do ... as a team member, you have a responsibility to raise any concern ... A supportive team will encourage its members to bring any concerns or difficulties they have to the team'. Coaching is fundamentally raising the awareness of an individual, or a team, so that they can easily take on responsibilities. As Aristotle stated 'Once a man understands an idea, he can identify with it and make it his own', so a coach can help individuals or teams to understand the issue and place a value upon it. If they can then add their own input through suggestions and use their own skills, they are motivated.

When a team shares a vision so they know where they are heading, and they know what is required of them through a mission statement, and they are aware of how their own skills fit in, then they only need motivation from the following to ensure success:

- a) appreciation for a job well done
- b) being kept well informed
- c) matching skills with tasks
- d) money.

Consider the section 'Working effectively as a team communicating with patients'. The essential qualities a coach

must exhibit are People Skills, Conflict Skills, and Communication Skills. These communication skills can be imparted to the team, and enable individuals to be more aware of the types of communication they need to use to build rapport with each other, and with patients. Skills such as active listening and effective questioning can be learnt.

Within the practice individuals can be differentiated into different groups through tools like the work preference inventory. Within each of these groups individuals communicate in different ways. An understanding of these principles from a coach will greatly improve the communication within teams. Non-verbal communication can also be learnt to provide massive leverage in building rapport. In dealing with people who are aggressive, the coach can help individuals apply assertive communication to take control of the situation.

Coaches can even help with communication between different sexes, which is essential in general dental practice.

Consider the section 'leading a team'; it states: 'A good team will have: good leadership ... clear, shared aims, and work together to achieve them ... different roles and responsibilities, and understand those roles and responsibilities'.

All of these issues relating to leadership can all be improved with coaching. A coach is aware that: Attitude + Behaviour = Outcome.

Coaching helps leaders to become more open, more flexible and more accepting of other people's diversity. It helps them become a resource that the team can call upon when needed, and helps them with delegation and motivation. Further, under this section, it states: 'encourage your team to work together effectively and put in place systems to review and monitor individual and team performance'.

Coaching will help a leader to give effective feedback and appreciation by the use of high quality data. This will ensure that any appraisal has a 'win: win' outcome.

Throughout all the different sections coaching can play an important role in ensuring that the principles laid down by the GDC are adopted and applied in the running of a dental practice. Coaching still has much more to offer dentistry within the realms of business. There is executive coaching of individuals such as the principal or their business managers. There is coaching change within a business, and there is constructive feedback.

Dentistry now demands evidence based material. A study of Fortune 1000 companies showed that following coaching businesses experienced an improvement in customer service by 39%, staff retention by 32%, and cost reduction by 23%. Those businesses that received coaching measured improvement in working relations with their boss by 77%, in teamwork by 67%, and in relationships with customers. This evidence shows that coaching has made a tremendous benefit to businesses. Further, those dental practices that have embraced coaching have achieved outstanding success, which has been recognised both within and outside the profession. It is my belief that more individuals, and practices, should use the services of a coach to improve, in all aspects, the way they, and the teams they work in, operate. Awareness will be greater, responsibility readily accepted and performance enhanced. There is definitely a role for coaching in modern day dental business.

1. Honey P. *Improve your people skills*. London: CIPD, 2001.
2. Gallwey W T. *The inner game of work*. USA: Texere, 2000.
3. Gillen T. *Leadership skills for boosting performance*. London: CIPD, 2002.