

The Process Driven Leader

Food for Thought from Libran Management.

What makes a good leader?

200 years ago, an officer leading a cavalry charge to likely doom could be considered a leader, brave leading his troops to immortality. In business Szun Tzu's 'Art of War' is a much quoted guide to strategy and leadership to this day. This ancient Chinese text describes the skills and intelligence required to muster, keep and ultimately beat your opposition.

As the principal of your dental practice what are the qualities you feel are needed to lead your team and your patients within your community?

It is not important at this time to consider inspirational figures like Nelson Mandela, Gandhi or more recently John Peters. Such figures, whilst uplifting, had platforms from which to speak, opponents to defeat and courage to flourish.

What I am writing about is practical business leadership that you, the practice owner might consider.

Leadership is about one thing, and it's nothing to do with cavalry charges,

it's all about process.

The process can be split into;

- 1) **Communication.** In an emotionally charged situation up to 55% of your communication is body language, the words 7% and their tone 38%. So if you struggle with stress, anxiety, anger, impatience, losses of concentration and an inability to listen, the chances are your team will feel the same.

So what do you do?

Lock yourself in your surgery and hope it will go away?

There are bigger issues at stake here, your health and wellbeing for a start. Do not confuse communication with internal marketing exercises and values based mission statements.

It's about you, how you feel, how you behave and how this relates to those around you.

The communication percentages even themselves out when matters are more fluid and without emotional charge. In other words, you have a better chance of being heard and acted upon when you are calm. You could say that by setting a professional and reasoned example that your team and patients will respond in kind. Obviously this is not always the case but it is how you listen, think and respond to what is around you in challenging situations that establishes you as a leader.

Good communications can be agreed delegation of responsibilities, clear late appointment protocols, cash flow forecasts, taking up Pilates or yoga. It is anything that provides a structured solution to your business challenges.

Think about how you want to be and what information you need to give and receive to achieve this.

- 2) **Keeping the vision in sight for all to see.**

It is very easy to make the unpredictability of the economy an excuse to stick your head in the sand and enter a purely survival focussed mindset. A leader knows the goals over the short, medium and long term, and accepts that the goals can change. What he never loses sight of is the vision. It's a lighthouse for all to see, leading you and your crew to the safety of harbour. If you do not know who in your team can see this light, find out quickly, they are to be kept. Unlike the movie 'Avatar' and its magnificent 3D story, in business goals, reports and spreadsheets are only a 2D representation of your business. I know its all about the bottom line but there are ways to enhance the bottom line in terms that are more difficult to put into an accounts column.

As a dentist what are your long term goals? How many of these could be the light in your lighthouse?

Many of your team want to turn up, do a good job, get paid fairly and go home. There is nothing wrong with that at all. So your personal vision and business vision can be very different. Once in a while step outside your business and look at it objectively, what does it look like? If you do not know, how can your team? Gathering information is another crucial part of leadership, being isolated cuts you off from opinion, feedback, who is back stabbing, doesn't like your vision and who is supporting you. As I said, find out who is going the same way as you and look after them.

Tolerating high performance staff undermining you is the easiest way to cede leadership.

- 3) **Action precedes motivation.** Do not wait for your team to be ready. Do not expect a meal out to bond your team. There will be casualties on this journey that is your business and what you want is action based upon a clear vision that your team can buy into, but don't waste too much time selling it. To use a metaphor, if you are in a sinking boat, do you get everyone bailing or do you describe the water? This does not mean you bully people, far from it. But there are times when despite resistance and a lack of will actions for the benefit of your business must be taken. Approaching these actions with a clear head and your own visions help communicate this more effectively and thus enhance your own leadership qualities.
- 4) **Consistency.** This falls into two forms, assertiveness and respect. There are simple rules to assertiveness. You have 3 choices to any situation that you wish to change.
 - a) You can tolerate it and do nothing but carry on being frustrated.
 - b) You can tolerate it and pretend it does not exist.
 - c) You can complain and do something.

With respect the choices are about taking personal responsibility.

- a) You have the right to be heard and your opinion
- b) Your colleague has the right to be heard and their opinion.
- c) You may agree, you may disagree but this does not change a or b.

What underlies and supports your leadership is a strong and consistent staff hand book.

It gives the rules of engagement, what is clearly expected from your team as well as what you will deliver yourself. This prevents many working hotspots becoming fires.

I suppose the question most of us ask is

'If I am not a good leader, how do I become one?'

For a 'The Process of Leadership' questionnaire please contact Libran Management on 07721622765 or email lyndsay@libranmanagement.com