

Dental team engagement and motivation in Post-Covid-19 time

Suggestions for a quick safely recovered daily routine



Mario R. Cappellin, DDS, MBE
Head physician
Clinica dentale Cappellin
Pinerolo (TO), Italy

Dear readers,

According to guidelines and specific national conditions, dentists are getting ready to restart their clinical activities; everybody has updated safety protocols to protect ourselves, our teams and obviously our patients from contagion risk and cross infections.

However we have to face an underestimated risk and this could undermine all our efforts: the correct implementation of every protocol, especially if safety-related, requires a global care and an high level of mental focus by the professionals involved.

If our teams had been inactive for these months, their psychological state couldn't be the best for a safe restart of clinical routine; in particular fear, anxiety and negativity (maybe due to the grief of a relative's death by Covid-19) could strongly impact the effectiveness of our workers.

Supporting our employees and collaborators in recovering confidence and trust is a crucial task to avoid any risk of errors and demotivation, which could decrease the quality of our services and even our clinical outcomes.

Early symptoms could be a lack of concentration, oversights and a general sense of melancholy; while someone is struggling to retrieve psychophysical equilibrium, the other members of the team can be easily influenced by this negativity, because in this peculiar circumstance people are more impressionable, due to the global dark mood shown by the mass-media, the social-media and above all by the deprivation of social contacts.

Everyone in our team deals with worries and uncertainty, maybe someone is experiencing financial difficulties too: as leaders of our company, first at all we have to reestablish a positive environment and hold up morale in order to ensure the safety of our patients and the best quality of our services.

The main reason of fear and worries could be related to apprehension, because it is possible to come into contact with asymptomatic patients infected by Covid-19; it is mandatory to deeply inform about the additional safety procedures, available individual protections, implemented technologies and investments made by the company to safeguard health of operators and patients.

We strongly suggest that you promote virtual meetings (ZOOM, Skype or similar), to discuss safety issues in order to involve the whole team in drafting and developing up to date protocols. It might seem obvious, but "feeling safe" is the first and most powerful motivation in any human behavior and if someone feels "threatened" by a danger or risk, due to a lack of effective communication or even just out of ignorance, he/she will tend to flee: if it cannot be done physically, it will be done psychologically for sure and it is more dangerous and insidious because it could cause errors, sometime irreparable ones.

As a second task, you should analyze how you have maintained personal contact with the members of your team. During lockdown, operational meetings and distance learning — both of which are a very important opportunity to maintain a work contact — were an unrepeatably chance to train your team and develop skills, especially the ones involved in communication.

Before restarting the clinical activity, you can prevent big personal issues in your team with individual meetings (virtually) to recognize any kind of stress or discomfort at the very beginning; except for rare cases, this should be sufficient to demonstrate your sincere carefulness to each team member, increasing your leadership; if you have too many workers, you can identify a small number of people whom you fully trust and appoint them as "tutors" for a small group of colleagues, empowering them to carry out the individual discussions. These meetings can help to intercept doubts, fears and uncertainties, identifying the causes and planning the needed actions to properly support your team.

As a third step, it is very important to clearly communicate strategies and objectives you are planning to restart, reinforce and further develop in your business. Declaring your policy about job security is a crucial point, because the team deserve to know if you are planning staff reduction and which kind of scenario could lead to this extreme choice.


Obviously, the best option is to avoid any staff reduction, because this can keep your team strongly motivated; probably you will have to face some economic efforts (even increasing your debts level), but you can maintain your resources and professional skills developed in many years and of course it will come in handy, especially in hard times.


If you have to dismiss some workers, we strongly suggest that you be transparent, however presenting this as the last option, in desperate cases: you should indicate clearly which kind of employee you cannot afford to keep in the company (for example, we demand big improvements in communication skills after the e-learning course we organized in these months AND we ask the members of our team to control interpersonal conflicts absolutely abstaining from creating tensions and discontent in the company, because we cannot afford communication errors and negativity; of course we hope that it will encourage people to follow our requests, we really wouldn't remove anybody from our team).

Finally, we suggest that you assume three scenarios for the future of your business: fast recovery, slow recovery or downsizing, so that you can plan how you can deal with these scenarios and above all what are the strategies that lead your team to fall into the first two hypotheses and to avoid the third. Strong communication is the key to engaging the whole team in achieving the shared targets and to reaching long term success.

Your team looks at you as the leader who can make them feel safe: you know your business and your team better than anyone else and as a physician you have to guarantee the integral health and welfare both of your patients and your team; I wish these simple suggestions can help you to react against this crisis and grant you full professional success and personal fulfilment.

Sincerely yours,

Mario R. Cappellin, DDS, MBE 
Head physician
Clinica dentale Cappellin
Pinerolo (TO), Italy
e-mail: mario.cappellin@clinicacappellin.it

 [https://doi.org/10.25241/stomaeduj.2020.7\(2\).edit.1](https://doi.org/10.25241/stomaeduj.2020.7(2).edit.1)