

## **The Secret of Building a Great Office Team**

Even though you became a plastic surgeon to work with patients, there's another group that is crucial to the success of your practice — your office staff.

Don't assume you can handle everything yourself. If your practice is larger than three or four employees, you may want to hire an office manager. Make sure you communicate daily with him or her to keep yourself fully informed of the function and morale in the office. But, remember that you are the leader of the team, and have the opportunity to set the tone for how the team will relate to one another (and, not to mention, to patients). Set the example. If you want to maintain a punctual, passionate, detail-oriented team, you will have to consistently hold your own behavior to the same standards.

Offering regular professional development seminars is an excellent way to bring your staff together, while ensuring that they stay up-to-date on the latest developments, products and procedures in your field. Team-building activities don't need to be boring, elaborate or unprofessional — in fact it's much better if they're simple. Despite what you may read [elsewhere](#), people generally do not appreciate being forced to have “fun” or to compete in games or contests. Depending on the culture of the office, some teams may enjoy friendly (and low-stakes, non-monetary) collective betting pools about sports or celebrities. Be careful, however, to make such activities unifying rather than divisive, and always avoid potentially controversial subjects (like politics or religion). Even a monthly staff lunch can help build professional bonds between the people you depend on to make your practice great. Awarding a recognition certificate at the end of each month to the employee who has been the most helpful, efficient or innovative is a good way to foster friendly competition and collaboration.

While each office culture has its own standards of professional conduct, it's generally considered polite to ask people how their weekend or vacation was, whether they have plans for an upcoming holiday, and so forth. To some extent, it's good to acknowledge major life events your staff may be experiencing. A marriage engagement, wedding or birth calls for congratulations; you may even want to present a small gift given collectively by the entire team. Tragic events (such as illness or death in the family) should be acknowledged respectfully; a sympathy card or flowers are appropriate ways to express condolences. Delving too deeply into employees' personal lives, of course, is to be avoided, as is sharing too many details of your own. Discussions of romantic involvements, or detailed expressions of health or finances, are best avoided in a professional setting.

Setting appropriate boundaries means being neither too friendly, nor too distant, with your team — a balance that can be difficult to achieve. Most crucial (and

sometimes most difficult) is to avoid talking about one team member to another, or allowing factionalism, rivalry or romance to interfere with the ability of your team to focus productively on running the practice.

Good practices don't simply run themselves — they rely on talented people working together to ensure that patients have the best possible experience from the moment they walk in or call on the phone. The team's face is your face, and they're looking to you for authority and leadership. A little praise and incentive can go a long way, and a smile and a word of thanks is always appreciated.