

Four Strategies for Decision Making: Inform Your Team Which You Are Using

Janice, a successful dentist came to us just after she bought into a practice. She was frustrated that her team rarely gave her significant input during staff meetings. “I can’t figure it out,” she told me. “I ask for their opinions, I want their thoughts—and all I get are half-hearted responses or nothing at all.”

I spent some time interviewing her staff and discovered that she was right: they were withholding. Once the situation was clear it was all pretty simple - the team felt set up.

The hygienists, dental assistants and front desk staff explained that they were reluctant to speak up at a recent meeting: “She asked us how the front desk should deal with patients who haven’t completed treatment. We all told her our ideas and the clear consensus was to send postcards and emails. Next thing we know, she’s telling us to call everyone instead. What was the point of all that talk when she’s going to make her own decision, anyway? It seemed like just a show. Like she wanted us to think she wanted our opinion... It was so manipulative!”

Even if you haven’t heard your staff accuse you out loud, I’m betting that once in awhile you’ve left them with the same confusion and frustration.

Your team needs to hear clearly how a decision will be made before you start any kind of decision process. This means that very often the first and most important decision you’ll have as a leader is to decide how to decide.

Here are four options:

My Way – “This is my decision alone”

With this approach, the buck stops with you. You feel you have all the information you need and accept responsibility for how the decision turns out.”

Consult – “I’ll make this decision, but I would like your thinking”

Input is valued, but you may have other concerns the team doesn’t know about or may not be able to weigh accurately. This decision may be important to the future of the business or to creating a business that reflects your personal style.

Majority Rules – “We’ll take a vote to decide how to proceed”

This decision will reflect a majority opinion. Listen to all the ideas and then vote on the approach you’ll take.

Consensus – “We will make this decision as a team and will only proceed when we all agree”

Often time consuming, but everyone gets to fully participate and the final decision will more likely be embraced by everyone.

Janice thought she was making a Consult decision, but the team assumed it was a Majority Rules and the stage was set for a misunderstanding. It’s always worse to give and then take away than to not give in the first place. The team felt Janice stole their dignity along with the right to make the decision.

And explanations don't work very well after the fact – say it up front.

Learning management by trial and error, like Janice is doing, will create a lot of sticky situations along the way. If you want to make it easy, tap into our skills at helping to build effective management skills and teams.

Want to learn more about maximizing productivity and cooperation with your team? To build or rebuild your team and create the high level support you want, it's essential that you know what works. Give us a call. We'd love to help you move forward.