

# Expectations From Your Morning Huddle

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A recent survey disclosed that only 30% of a dentist's success was related to clinical skills. The ability to communicate was rated a much larger factor in considering how well a practice performs. How you communicate with your patients, and of course how you communicate with your staff. Last month I discussed a number of topics for monthly staff meetings. In this article, I would like to discuss the importance of a daily meeting with your staff known as the morning huddle. A morning huddle is an absolute easy and great way to get good communication going between doctor and staff and between staff and staff.

The morning huddle is a short 13 to 15 minute gathering attended by all staff and all doctors. Ideally I would like to see the doctor arrive first and pass out coffee to the staff members as they arrive! But I will settle for the doctor at least being there on time and ready to participate. If the first patient is seen at 8 AM, I would like staff to arrive at 7:30 to get ready for the day, and then be available for the huddle at 7:45.

The doctor should not lead the huddle. I suggest that you rotate leaders of the huddle (daily or weekly) to give them an opportunity to refine their skills and present material from their own particular perspective. Front desk personnel, dental assistants and hygienists should all take a turn in this capacity. Everyone at the meeting is supplied with a print out of the daily schedule.

1. I believe that all emergency patients should be seen on the day that they call. At the huddle, identify the three best spots for emergencies to be seen (side booked) that day based on the doctor's treatment schedule. It is very important for the front desk to know this before the day begins so that they can handle the emergency call seamlessly. And this approach is an excellent way for the person answering the telephone to evaluate a true emergency. How does that work? Someone calls with a toothache. The first time offered might be 9 AM, and the response from the patient is "I have to take my kid to school." The second time offered is noon. The response is "Gee – I have a tee time at the golf course." It is obvious that this person doesn't have a true emergency and does not have to be seen that day. By selecting the emergency times before the day begins, you eliminate the need to put a patient on hold and run back to ask the doctor who is just about to navigate the mesio-buccal canal of an upper second molar!
2. Who are the new patients on the schedule? Let's be sure we know who referred that patient, and review the detailed information about the patient that should have been gathered during their initial telephone call. It is so impressive to a patient when you have all of this information available. It shows how well you have prepared for their visit. And the thought in the mind of the patient is if this office is that good with their preparation and their communication, then they must be good in ALL aspects of dentistry.
3. The doctor's responsibility at the morning huddle is to have previously reviewed (the night before or before the huddle started) every hygiene patient chart and make possible written comments and suggestions. Possibly a PAX on an endodontically treated tooth – maybe a strong

recommendation about a previously presented treatment plan for crowns in the lower right quadrant. Hygienists might not be thinking in exactly that way. Lots of treatment dollars will often be left on the table without this kind of an exercise.

4. Are there patients scheduled today who are chronically late or forgetful? The morning huddle is a good opportunity to review who should receive a courtesy call as an additional reminder.
5. Quickly review the scheduled treatment on the doctor's schedule. Fine tune to be sure the flow is adequate. Where could the trouble spots be? Do you have to potentially adjust the time – shorten or lengthen – for anyone's appointment?
6. It is a lot easier to do the dentistry than to get paid for the dentistry, and it is tough to pay your bills with receivables. So it is key to review the deposits and co-payments that are to be collected that day for treatment already scheduled. At this point in the meeting, it would also be good to share a quick report on the previous day for production, collections and the percentage collected over the counter.
7. Over the years, I have found a great way to end the meeting on a high note. The staff person who is in charge of leading the huddle is assigned and responsible for telling a joke. There are lots of sources out there on the Internet. Sometimes what is a lot funnier than the actual joke is the person's attempt to tell a joke. This usually gets everyone smiling and laughing as they face the multiple challenges of another day at the office.

There is no question in my mind that a well run morning huddle sets the tone for a productive, profitable and smooth flowing day. Give it a try – and I'd love to hear from you with any comments or alternative suggestions.

~Mayer

**Dr. Levitt has been a great friend of The Madow Group for many years, and is one of the best resources for practice management efficiency tips in dentistry. He is the president of Jodena Consulting, offering personalized advice for business and practice management since 1989.**

**Dr. Levitt also trains successful dentists who are at, or near the end of their clinical careers to become consultants in their area of the country. For more information, call him at (401) 421-3615, email him at [jodena@cox.net](mailto:jodena@cox.net).**