



The Optical Assistant Team of the Year receive their trophy at the *Optician Awards* night

In 2010 Specsavers Sutton-in-Ashfield, won the Family Optician of the Year award, so this year the practice decided to enter again. This time round it entered the Optical Assistant Team of the Year – and won.

‘The whole team were chuffed to bits,’ says practice director Nigel Davidson, ‘full of pride and ebullience.’ He puts their success down to training ‘but particularly frequent and open communication’.

He says what sets them apart is making the team greater than the sum of the individuals. ‘It is people who make the biggest difference in everything we do – after all we become successful by making other people successful. It is not just the performance of the professionally qualified members of the team, but everyone from the latest recruit to our longstanding team members who have been with us for 10 years or more.’

Davidson says that team-building is vital to the success of the practice. The staff take part in many social events such as their annual camping event, open days and nights out.

Optical assistant Tina Johnson comments: ‘They are always arranging fun nights out and weekend activities. We, as a store, get involved with the local community, just giving a bit back to our much valued customers.’ The practice is involved in numerous charity events, from Christmas sing-alongs to Vision Aid Overseas collections. The store manager Lisa Redfern organises many charity events such as a summer fair which raised money for a local group, Ashfield Friends of the Blind.

Davidson says this is all part of the team ethos. ‘We try to be caring and compassionate at all times, treat people fairly and have fun.’ That produces results but also maintains a good spirit and a human touch, he says. Apart from team-building activities, staff also give one another moral support.

‘It is commonplace for team members to receive flowers to commemorate special occasions such as a marriage, long service or other milestones,’ says Davidson.

The team also communicate through notice boards placed throughout the store, meetings and the new in-store telephone system. ‘We can find



Spirit of success

Winning one *Optician Award* wasn’t enough for Specsavers Sutton in Ashfield. **Laura Else** reports on a second morale-boosting triumph

out stuff about each other that we wouldn’t have otherwise known. This helps to cement relationships and improve cohesion in the workplace.’

Performance feedback

Specsavers Sutton-in-Ashfield aims to encourage a culture of constant improvement. The staff are continuously reassessing their performance with a meeting at the end of each day to provide feedback on how well they have done. This is backed up with mystery shop visits, in which, says Davidson, the store achieved full marks in the first four visits of 2010.

In its award entry, the practice described training and team development as its core activity. It has an in-store trainer who instructs new members and everyone who joins works through the Specsavers career

development programme.

Good individual performance within the team is also encouraged. Each staff member has annual appraisals with quarterly feedback and top performers are recognised in team meetings and a ‘Top Team Super Player’ is chosen from the optical assistants each quarter. Prizes and medals are often handed out.

Strong leadership is important to the optical assistants and they appreciate the direction given by Davidson and Redfern. ‘They value us all and always encourage us with our training and development needs,’ says Johnson. ‘Nigel is never too busy to talk to us and he also takes many training sessions himself.’

Davidson saw winning the award as a ‘morale boost’ for the team and plans to enter again. He would also encourage other practices to enter.

Leadership is about teams, he says, empowering staff and delegation of tasks to the most appropriate person. ‘At the highest level there must be a vision for where the practice is going, but there must be real spirit otherwise your team will not come with you.’

Davidson’s team did just that and they have the trophy to prove it. ●

OPTICAL ASSISTANT TEAM OF THE YEAR

● **Winner** Specsavers Opticians, Sutton-in-Ashfield

● **Shortlisted**
Kite Opticians, Ipswich
Specsavers Opticians, Bedford
Boots Opticians, Swindon