

Dental Consultant Master Academy

evolve ■ emerge ■ influence

Transcript - Week 30

Team Building: Overcoming Inefficiencies so the Glue Will Stick! Part I

Hello, this is Debbie and welcome to week 30 of your Dental Consultant Master Academy!

This week and for two weeks, I want to talk about team building because this is so difficult to have and it is the glue that will hold together your services and systems you want implemented for success.

I have found that when there is not a TEAM, and then what we do as a consultant and/or coach does not stick. All hard work is never implemented, at least from my personal experience.

This week I will talk about 2 of the many inefficiencies in TEAMS that I know of. I will talk about the one characteristic that needs to be present to have a solid team and then also how to handle or better yet, get away from or at least how to handle conflict that I have found is present in every dental team I have ever know!

Next week I will address three more characteristics and their inefficiencies. Without a TEAM all of your hard work can and in my cases, it will be lost soon after you leave the office.

So let's get started on this weeks training!

I recently came across this acronym for TEAM and I wanted to share it with you.

Together Everyone Accomplishes More

Do you see the "T" in team? Well now you do!

This is a quote I recently found online "Contrary to popular belief, there most certainly is an 'T' in 'team.' It is the same 'T' that appears three times in 'responsibility.'" By Amber Harding

And here is a picture I also came across recently when I was preparing for a presentation. You can see that the word responsibility is part of the team.

In this day and age of informational ubiquity and nanosecond change not only in dentistry but in our world today, teamwork remains the one sustainable competitive advantage that has been largely untapped. In the course of my career as a consultant and working with dental teams, I can confidently say that teamwork is almost always lacking within dental practices that are failing. It is often lacking in dental practices that are succeeding.

Most consultants focus their time on topics such as finances, technology, marketing, etc, when what we may need to focus on is the true measure of a team to accomplish the results we set out to achieve.

Before we embark on team building efforts, let's talk about two questions that need to be answered:

Question number 1 is: Are we really a team? Sometimes a team improvement effort is doomed from the start because the group going through it isn't really a team at all, at least not in the true sense of the word.

What is a team? First I will define that a team is a small number of people anywhere from three to twelve that shares common goals as well as rewards and responsibilities for achieving them. Team members readily set aside their individual or personal needs for the greater good of the group.

If the team doesn't meet the criteria, you may want to consider whether you have a smaller subset of the group that is a real team. Or maybe the group is simply a collection of people who report to the same manager, but with relatively little interdependence and mutual accountability. This is not called a team.

It is ok to decide that the group is not a team. In a world where teamwork is much rare then we might think, plenty of non-teams succeed. If the dental office has a group of people that is not meant to be a team it is much better to be clear about this than to waste time and energy pretending they are something they are not. False expectations lead to frustration and resentment.

The second question is Are we ready for heavy lifting? Having said all of the above mentioned, I want to be very clear because the advantages of having a true team are enormous! And they can't be achieved without a willingness to invest considerable time and emotional energy in the process. Unfortunately, many teams are not prepared for this. This is where the team is prevented from making progress and as a consultant who is trying to accomplish change or implement new services and/or systems; it can feel like we are hitting our head against a wall.

Becoming a team doesn't have to take a lot of years. And it doesn't have to be unpleasant. Most teams can make great strides in their progression of becoming a real team in a few months, maybe even weeks. It can also be rewarding in their personal life as well as it will be in their professional life. This is IF it is done correctly.

So now let's talk about how to do this correctly.

Based in my experience of working with teams for over forty years, I have come to one inescapable conclusion: no quality or characteristic is more important than trust. In fact my work with teams revolves around their trust more than anything else. Did you know that this is the number 1 reason why patients will accept their dentists care? It is the reason why patients will continue returning to their one dental office for years and years.

There is probably no quality or characteristic that is as rare as trust. If you can be the 1st person to build trust the possibility of achieving a real competitive advantage is possible. This is where you will be able to accomplish the necessary changes and it is why your clients and their teams will be successful.

You will find that trust with teams is all about vulnerability. Team members who become comfortable being open, even exposed, to one another around their failures, weaknesses, even fears is what this trust is about.

This is not meant to be all touchy-feely. Vulnerability based trust is predicated on the simple and practical idea that people who are not afraid to admit the truth about themselves are not going to engage in the kind of political behavior that wastes everyone's time and energy and more importantly, make the accomplishment of results an unlikely scenario.

The second reason why vulnerability based trust is so rare is that it is just plain hard to achieve, even when teams understand this definition. This is because human beings, especially the adult variety, have this crazy desire for self-preservation. The idea of putting themselves at risk for the good of others is not natural and is rarely rewarded in life, at least not the way people expect.

This is where we learn that phrase "look out for number one." Or "don't let them see you sweat!" And while you may think this is wise counsel if you are in prison, on a team it is lethal.

The key here is to get team members to be comfortable being exposed to one another, unafraid to honestly say things like "I was wrong" and "I made a mistake" and "I need help" and "I'm not sure" and "You are better than I am at that" and yes, even saying "I'm sorry." If team members can't bring themselves to readily speak these words when the situation calls for it, they will not learn to trust one another. Instead they are going to waste time and energy thinking about what they should say and wondering about the true intentions of their peers.

As hard as it is to achieve vulnerability based trust, it is entirely doable. And better yet, it doesn't have to take a lot of time. I have seen remarkable distrust within teams who have worked together for many years. I have even been a part of many teams like this when I was working clinically as a hygienist and even at my first job as a dental assistant about forty years ago! I have also seen teams who were only a team for no more than six months and they developed amazing amounts of trust. The key ingredient to this is called courage.

For a team to establish real trust, team members, beginning with the leader, must be willing to take risks without a guarantee of success. They will have to be vulnerable without knowing whether that vulnerability will be respected and reciprocated.

Once the team has begun the process of building trust, it is time to think about leveraging that trust. Trust is important because it is a requirement for overcoming the next dysfunction which is the fear of conflict.

Any team that wants to maximize its effectiveness needs to learn to do this and doing so can only happen if vulnerability based trust exists.

This is not to say that some teams that lack trust don't have conflict. It is just that their conflict is destructive because they are laced with politics, pride and competition, rather than humble pursuit of truth.

When people who don't trust one another engage in passionate debate, they are trying to win the argument. They are not usually listening to the other person's ideas and then reconsidering their point of view. They are figuring out how to manipulate the conversation and get what they want. Or it may be even worse yet and they are not even arguing with the other person face-to-face but venting about them to others in the hallway after the meeting is over.

In contrast when vulnerability based trust exists, team members say everything that needs to be said, and there is nothing left to talk about behind closed doors.

Does this make conflict sound too easy to overcome? Well, even the best teams are a little uncomfortable with even a little conflict. No matter how clear everyone is that their conflict is focused on issues, not personalities, it is inevitable that they will feel under some degree of personal attack. It is unrealistic for a person to say "I am sorry Dr. Goodtooth, but I don't agree with our approach to handling that child and their behavior yesterday," and not have the dentist feel personal attack.

This is no reason to avoid conflict. In fact, if team members are not making one another uncomfortable at times, if they are never pushing one another outside of their emotional comfort zones during discussions, then it is extremely likely that they are not making the best decisions for their dental practice.

One way for a team to know if they are having enough conflict is for them to think about how an outsider to the team would feel sitting in on a team meeting. A great team will look at least a little strange to an outsider who isn't accustomed to the direct and unfiltered dialogue taking place. Think about a friend who is invited to a close friend's family's house for dinner. They would probably be a little uncomfortable sitting at their table the first time they are invited.

Have you ever experienced a team meeting when it did get personal? I have! I was in a team meeting with a client and her team about 18 months ago and the hygienist almost attacked the doctor physically because she was not comfortable with the changes the doctor wanted in her practice.

So what do you do if this conflict does get personal?

Imagine this line and on one side is artificial harmony with no conflict at all. On the other side there are mean-spirited, personal attacks. In the exact middle of the continuum there is a line where conflict goes from constructive to destructive or vice versa, depending on which direction you are going. Now the vast majority of teams I have encountered live close to the harmony end of the scale, fearing that any movement toward the middle is one step closer to murder.

Theoretically, the best place on the continuum is close to the middle, just to the left of the dividing line. This is the point where a team is having every bit of constructive conflict possible without stepping over the line into destructive territory.

In reality this is not possible. Even the best teams will rarely but occasionally step over the line. And that is not only okay it actually can be a good thing as long as the members of the team are committed to working through it.

When a team does recover from an incident of destructive conflict, it builds confidence that can survive such an event, which in turn builds trust. This is not unlike a husband and wife recovering from a big argument and developing closer ties and greater confidence in their relationship as a result.

By the way, the team I told you about where the hygienist almost attacked the dentist physically ---well she was written up and given a warning. I know==surprising that she was not fired that day but everyone worked through it and the entire team is all better after going through that conflict and challenging situation.

Ok, enough theoretical stuff. Let's talk about practical ways to go about helping your teams get more comfortable with productive conflict. And the first thing your teams will want to do is determine its conflict profile.

I want to share with you what is called the Myers-Briggs Profile. It includes a very specific analysis about how each type of person deals with conflict.

So how do you go about discovering each team members' conflict style? The best way to do it is to talk about it. Have your teams read the Myers Briggs Personality Profile. Or if you used a different personality profile go ahead and have your teams use this to determine how they can interact better with each other.

I also like to have my teams use these personality profiles so they better understand their patients.

Most teams I have worked with are able to self-diagnose themselves according to the book we use. The point here is that people self-identify and publicly declare their outlook on conflict; they become much more open to adjusting it to whatever team norms need to be established.

Next week I will talk more about team building, getting commitment, accountability and getting results.

I am big on results and I hope you are as well so I look forward to sharing this important information with you next week.

This is Debbie signing off. Everyone, have a great week!

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