



LCP Dental Team Coaching (the new name for Julie Weir & Associates) is recognized as the premier consulting firm specializing in pediatric dentistry since 1996.

Six Easy Steps to Create a Healthy Practice Culture

Employees consider company culture to be just as important as salary and benefits. Many employees desire to be part of a greater purpose and feel valued and engaged. Many doctors are unaware of the importance of company culture and employee engagement. An employee may be regarded as expendable and this creates unnecessary costs. Great company culture happens intentionally. A deliberate culture shift creates a more meaningful place to work and better patient and parent experiences. This leads to increased productivity and therefore, an increase in profits.

REAL LIFE SCENARIOS

Poor management and leadership: A team member walks into your office. You already know what she is going to say. She begins to discuss the team's neglect of assisting with end-of-day closing. You have yet to address this recurring issue and frankly, you still don't want to. This seems really unimportant compared to your other priorities. Once again, you let her know that you will address it immediately, which never happens.

Lack of accountability: Your financial coordinator has been with your practice for 16 years. Her insurance knowledge and comprehension is stronger than any other team member. As your practice grows, you add a new leadership position. A front office coordinator is hired to help oversee the front office systems. You learn that your long-standing financial coordinator disregarded your collection protocols. Instead of collecting at the time of service, she is sending a statement. You put emphasis on the importance of managing your accounts receivable and discussed this repeatedly. Your front office coordinator discusses expectations with her and reviews the expected collections protocol. Once again, the financial coordinator ignores this system. A lack of respect for leadership is now present after not being held accountable for many years.

Lack of appreciation: You created a bonus system to motivate your team and for the last six months, goals were met! Last month, production was slightly below goal and the team missed out on their accustomed bonus. During your team meeting, one of your clinical team members verbalizes her frustration. A front office team member echoes this same frustration; however, blame is being put onto others. Your team seems visibly distressed. They state that without a bonus, their pay is less than expected. The team's entitlement aggravates you, especially after much effort to keep them motivated.

Careless approach: You notice that your team members start to pay less attention to details and are becoming more casual. You hear your team members using profanity in the sterilization area. This is not the ideal professional atmosphere you want. How did it get this far? You begin to wonder what caused the tactless and inappropriate behavior.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How would you describe your practice culture?
- What or who has allowed your culture to become this way?
- What are your core values and vision as a practice?
- How do you consistently communicate your vision to your team?

- How do you support and motivate your team each day?
- What are some of the ways that your practice celebrates its wins and successes?
- What causes conflict, and how is conflict resolved?
- What would you like to see different with your practice culture?
- How does your practice culture affect your patients and their parents?

ACTIONABLE STEPS

- 1. Define your practice vision.** Start by being clear on who you are and what you desire for your practice. John Maxwell states "while culture is what gets you to your destination, vision *determines* the destination". You cannot achieve great company culture if your team does not know where they are headed.
- 2. Hold a team meeting and agree on your practice's definition of culture.** Have your team create their own Team Mission Statement that reflects their values and their vision. Involve your entire team and make a point to hear from each team member. Allow others to respond and give feedback. More input and involvement will make the definition clearer.

3. Identify 3-5 core values. Core values are the regulatory principles of your practice. Define a small number of meaningful core values for your practice. This will ensure they can remember them and focus on living them each day.

4. Empower and encourage your team members. Many times, employees leave their jobs from lack of appreciation. Make a conscious effort to share your appreciation and motivate them each day. Every personal and professional goal your team members reach also helps you to achieve your goals.

5. Communicate efficiently and effectively. Be intentional about how information is communicated among your team. Each team member must feel that their input, positive or negative, is respected and valued. They want to be part of the process. Keep them in the loop.

6. Hire new team members according to culture fit first, above all else. Use a hiring process that evaluates a potential team member's core values and goals, in addition to experience and skill set. Hire them and then inspire them. We tend to look for team members that join us with minimum interruption to the culture. This is not realistic. We need a highly motivated team member. Keep in mind; however, that we can discourage a highly motivated team member by consistently focusing on their mistakes. Concentrate on structured training that guides your new team member to be successful. When we only share the negative, they will eventually stop listening.

MEASURABLE STEPS

Be specific with what you are implementing. Culture is not a concept. Set specific goals that are measurable, i.e., smile, avoid complaining about the difficult families that are coming in today or how challenging the day is going to be the way it is scheduled. Be purposeful about beginning each day with a positive message or quote.

Evaluate how you feel. Do you enjoy work more each day? Does serving your patients and parents increase your fulfillment?

Evaluate how your team feels. Ask your team how they feel at the end of each day. Is the team happy with each other? Are patients' and parents' experiences more enjoyable?

Your team culture reflects what your practice stands for. Strong cultured dental practices feel more genuine and stimulate and inspire employees. First, evaluate your current practice culture. Then, work on improvements by giving your team a sense of purpose. Work on encouraging them in their roles and creating a platform for clear and open communication. At your next team meeting, ask your employees to define your current practice culture. Do they think your practice culture is healthy or could it benefit from some attention and improvement?

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