



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

AAPD Team Talk Session: What Employees Want Employers to Know

A surprise resignation from an employee can quickly derail your hard work, negatively impact team morale, hinder production, and increase stress. Doctors are so busy treating patients and figuring out how to remain profitable during this unpredictable Covid-era that red flags are often missed along the way. More resignations are possible if leaders miss the warning signs. Team members will not always share what they are thinking or feeling. The good news is that they shared some of their thoughts at Team Talk with Dr. Bobby Elliott and LCP Dental Team Coach Lilly Cortes-Pona, at the AAPD Meeting in San Diego in May. Team members shared beneficial information they felt their doctors should know. This article contains valuable information team members shared with us.

The group of over 500 participants was composed of:

- 39% Office Managers/Administrators/Clinical Leads
- 35% Dental Assistants
- 13% Front Desk Team Members
- 13% Hygienists

Before the course, they were asked to respond to a few questions:

- 87% of team members reported that their doctor recognizes them for Dental Assistant Week/Hygienist Appreciation Week/Administrative Professionals Day
- 94% reported having a positive work environment
- 6% reported a toxic work culture

When asked what the most important topic or issue in their practice is, these were the highest responses:

- Communication
- Team Building
- Feeling Appreciated

CREATING AND MAINTAINING A POSITIVE WORK CULTURE

With everyone having experienced two of the most challenging years of their careers, cultivating a positive culture is more important than ever. Dental practices where team members feel valued and safe and look forward to going to work and enjoying their day are the most successful. When teams feel heard, supported, and appreciated, their job satisfaction and performance increase. Investing in teams and creating a positive culture should be just as important as purchasing cutting-edge equipment.

Team culture is a collection of values, behaviors, and beliefs team members share. Every team has a culture, whether created intentionally or evolved organically. Now is the time for dentists and leaders to reflect, observe and evaluate. Notice how team members talk to patients and parents, how they talk about each other, and how they talk with one another and their leaders. Do they arrive to work on time, ready to do whatever it takes? Are the practice leaders providing a positive, respectful, and safe environment in which to communicate? Are leaders creating the type of environment they want their team to emulate? To build a strong team culture, leaders must decide what they intend for that

culture, define their expectations for their team, and set an example by living up to their values. When people feel seen, heard, and respected, they're more likely to focus on what needs to be done instead of giving umbrage or being defensive.

Cultivating a healthy practice culture means everyone aligns with the doctor's vision and their role within the team. Start creating a desirable culture where employees brag about their workplace.

These simple steps empower team members to feel confident, not competitive:

Create a team-oriented organization – make it clear that teamwork is a core value; emphasize the group rather than the individual.

Assign goals – Be clear about expectations and share the plans with the team; what is their role in helping to achieve them?

Cross train – Don't allow employees to say, "That's not my job." A true team mentality is created when everyone knows how to fill the gaps and help wherever needed.

Provide education – No matter how qualified a team is, the dental industry constantly changes. Don't allow team members to feel limited by their lack of knowledge. Offer them ample opportunities to learn and grow. When people know better, they do better. The more doctors invest in their team members, the more they will believe in the doctor's vision and success.

CFO asks the CEO: "What happens if we invest in developing our people, and then they leave us?"

CEO: "What happens if we don't, and they stay?"

"Train people well enough so they can leave. Treat them well enough, so they don't want to." ~ Richard Branson

Communication is key to healthy team culture. The best way to improve communication is by having regular and productive meetings. Meetings should be well-planned with an agenda, discussing old and new business. Everyone should be invited to participate and speak in an open and safe environment. Meetings should start and end on time and always be a place for everyone to have a voice. The important meetings for next-level communication among team members are:

Morning Huddle: Each day should begin with a Morning Huddle. Starting the day united will set the tone and prepare the day by starting and ending on a positive note, discussing the game plan, changes in the schedule, who will do what, and where to go the extra mile. What treatment is scheduled? Any unfinished treatment? Are financial arrangements complete? Engineer the schedule for the next three days.

Squish Squash: At the end of the day, hold a five-minute meeting where the team quickly touches base on what worked and areas that need improvement. It is not meant to be a complaining session, just a quick problem-solving/planning meeting. Anything that needs further, or lengthier discussion should be discussed at the Monthly Team Meeting.

Monthly Team Meeting: The leaders should schedule these meetings in the software calendar for the entire year. A "Topics to Discuss" sheet should be posted in the breakroom so the team may add topics to address as they

occur throughout the month. Once the agenda is finalized, each team member should receive a copy in advance, so they may be prepared to participate in the meeting. The meeting should revisit old business in progress, discuss new business and have open discussion time. An action plan with deadlines must be completed at each meeting, so everyone knows what they are responsible for accomplishing.

Quarterly Department Meetings: Department meetings should be held monthly, on a rotating basis, meeting with each department once per quarter. For example, in January, meet with the Administrative Team; February, meet with the Clinical Team; in March, meet with the Leadership Team; and in April, meet with the Marketing Team. Touching base with each department for more in-depth discussions allows doctors to check the pulse in every part of their practice.

Team building brings teams together to nurture relationships and encourages them to work together more constructively. Team building/bonding is vital for cultivating the desired culture. Team building not only enables teams the opportunity to interact with each other outside of the office but also helps them to build relationships and trust with doctors, leaders, and each other. Team building activities can be as simple as holding a monthly potluck over an extended lunch hour, blocking off an afternoon twice a year for team outings such as bowling or mini golf, having pizza and games, and a yearly team retreat for a weekend. Activities like scavenger hunts and escape rooms typically allow natural leaders to emerge and build confidence. Creative ways for teams to build relationships and have fun helps them bond and work well together daily, increasing productivity and communication.

While team culture is critical, recognizing individuals is crucial to making team members feel valued. Celebrating their birthdays and work anniversaries and remembering all their hard work throughout the year makes team members feel seen and that all of their hard work is appreciated. Recognition builds loyalty, dedication, a positive work environment, and commitment to the practice goals and vision. In addition to monetary rewards, team members feel these core values are also important:

Trust: This is essential in all relationships, both personal and professional. Actively listen to what people say, providing plenty of avenues for dialogue.

Care: Get to know employees as individuals. Learn the names of their children and what is important to them.

Respect: Giving respect to team members demonstrated to them how to respect one another, regardless of position or title.

Appreciation: Everyone wants to be appreciated; genuinely give praise and recognition when someone does something well. Simple gratitude is often overlooked and underrated. Praise in public, correct in private.

Optimism: Studies have shown that positivity affects the brain and increases employee engagement. Teams are more creative, productive, energetic, and motivated in optimistic, encouraging environments.

Feedback: People need to know how their performance contributes to the practice's goals.

Every team member has a heart. Many hearts are hurt, broken, and downcast in the current Covid-era and economic downturn. Providing a safe space for employees where they are valued, appreciated, and needed, will create an environment where people will not want to leave, even if they are offered more elsewhere. Offering a competitive compensation package that rewards their hard work and gifts them for being loyal employees will all play a big part in decreasing stress, solidifying employee retention and increasing production and collections.

“Customers will never love a company until the employees love it first”

Simon Sinek

Published four times a year, Practice Management and Marketing News is a featured column in Pediatric Dentistry Today.



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