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

Five Strategies to Cultivate an Ownership Mentality in Employees

In the heart of Chicago's West Loop is a hot dog stand, where a Practice Coordinator and the practice owner often grab a quick bite and talk through the day's challenges. On this day, they were discussing an opportunity to further develop their team with an onsite practice management coach. The practice owner asked, "What if we spend time and money to invest in developing and empowering our employees, and they leave us?" The coordinator thought for a moment and responded, "What if we don't develop them and invest in them, and they stay?"

In a job market that is increasingly challenging to find and keep great talent, leaders can become passive about developing their teams. The opportunity to elevate a team's mindset and develop them as leaders is available every day. The most crucial day in a leader's life is when they realize that their greatest asset and the solution to all their problems is already in their office, which is their people. The most challenging realization in a leader's life is that significant or lasting success must be achieved through their people rather than on their own.

A leader must continually elevate the team's mentality to achieve long-term success, legacy, or improved production and teamwork. Mentality refers to the characteristics of a person's attitude or way of thinking. When a leader can influence their team's attitude and way of thinking, the opportunity for creating momentum and true teamwork opens. The type of mentality that will elevate the effectiveness of a team and create lasting success depends on the leader and the culture they want to cultivate in their practice. However, a trait that has proven to be at the core of all successful teams has been an ownership mentality.

Before we dive into how to foster an ownership mentality within a team, it's essential to understand what it means. An ownership mentality is the mindset of taking full responsibility for one's actions and decisions within one's role. It involves being accountable, proactive, and solution oriented.

According to Path for Growth, a leadership development platform, an ownership mentality is "the decision to be ruthlessly responsible for the things you can control." This means taking ownership of tasks, challenges, and outcomes instead of shifting blame or waiting for someone else to take charge. It is the difference between seeing a problem and reacting or foreseeing an issue and preparing a solution. One mentality is passive, while the other is proactive. When thinking about the front office or the clinical team, it is easy to see how a lack of ownership in any role can lead to conflict, challenges, and turnover.

HOW TO INSPIRE AN OWNERSHIP MENTALITY?

As a pediatric dental office leader, fostering an environment where team members feel empowered to take ownership is imperative. Here are five ways to encourage and support a team in developing an ownership mentality:

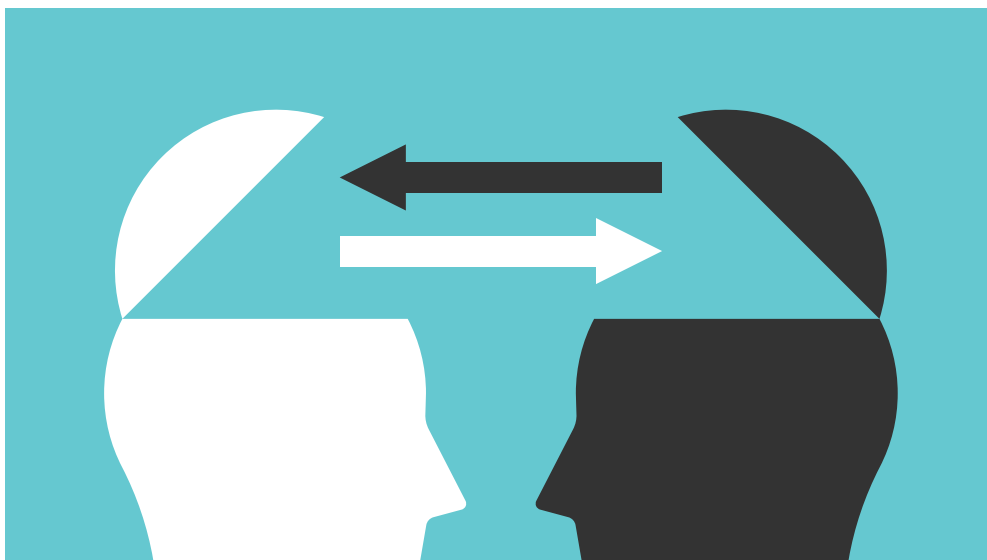
- 1. Lead by example:** A leader must exemplify the behavior they want to see reflected in their team. They should take ownership of tasks and decisions, not be afraid to admit mistakes and take responsibility for them. Showing up on time for Morning Huddles, being fully present at Leadership, Marketing and Team Meetings are important examples. The most powerful leadership tool is a person's example. Exemplary leaders treat their team members the way they want their team to treat their patients.

2. **Provide training and support:** Team members may need to gain the necessary skills or knowledge to take ownership of their roles. Even if someone has numerous years of experience, it does not mean they are proficient. They need to be taught the dentist's standards and requirements. Leaders look for creative ways to deliver proper training and support to help every team member develop their skills. Too often, leaders think that training and support of their team is a one-and-done activity. Leadership and coaching are daily activities until the team member proves they can succeed at the task. They need more training if they cannot fully train someone else how to do the task properly. How long does learning to ride a bike, drive a car, or tie a shoe take? Yet how little time is invested in training key elements necessary for success? Time must be spent having difficult conversations and dealing with conflict appropriately. Most teams are severely under-trained by their leaders. On average, people must hear and practice something at least seven times before it becomes habitual.
3. **Give autonomy but set expectations:** Autonomy is crucial for developing an ownership mentality, but it's essential to set clear expectations and guidelines. This will ensure that team members know their boundaries and feel confident in taking ownership within those boundaries. Expectations include reasonable timelines, order of task priority, and a lifeline to ask for help should they hit a roadblock.
4. **Acknowledge and reward:** Recognize and acknowledge team members who demonstrate an ownership mindset. Publicly praise them in a team meeting for their efforts and impact on the practice. Consider implementing rewards, such as prizes, to incentivize ownership behavior further.

5. **Encourage open communication:** A culture of open communication is essential for team members to feel comfortable taking ownership. Encourage them to openly share their ideas, suggestions, and concerns without fear of judgment. This is easier said than done, but as with all worthwhile things, this will take time and practice to cultivate. As a leader, go first and exemplify what open communication looks like. In an organization, open communication helps ensure everyone is on the same page and understands their roles, responsibilities, and goals. Open communication is helpful in creating a positive environment of trust and respect between individuals and teams.

A helpful exercise to personalize what an ownership mentality looks like is to ask everyone on the team to answer five questions. This would be a helpful exercise during the next full team meeting or office team bonding event. Have each team member take turns answering the five questions below and discuss how to increase the team's ownership mentality.

- Question 1: In your own words, what does having an ownership mentality mean to you in your role?**
- Question 2: What in previous jobs or your role currently blocks you from being proactive?**
- Question 3: Why is an ownership mentality important in a growing dental practice like ours?**
- Question 4: What is one reason you resist taking ownership of your role, and what role do you play if you are not taking ownership?**
- Question 5: What is one new way to exercise an ownership mentality or the decision to be ruthlessly responsible for the things you can control?**



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A team will likely surprise their leader with their answers to these questions. The greatest obstacle to most people embracing an ownership mentality is the fear of making mistakes. Whether due to childhood trauma or a toxic work environment, team members often carry the baggage of their past and the detrimental impacts of poor leadership. As a leader, it is beneficial to foster a growth-oriented outlook. In a growth-minded environment, a team learns

to view challenges as opportunities for growth rather than obstacles or inconveniences. Emphasize the importance of learning from mistakes and continuously improving. Instead of saying failure is not an option, say failure is not an option; it is necessary for improvement. Equipping everyone in an organization to engage in an ownership mentality without fearing failure will take any team from where they are towards where they want to be.

“Treat your employees as an investment, not a cost.”

Dan Sullivan

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