

# Leadership Unlocked



## Three Doors to Positive Team Accountability

Is it possible to wave a magic wand and radically improve the productivity and profitability of a practice with significantly happier employees? Yes, it is possible! However, it is simpler than procuring a wand from the Wizarding World of Harry Potter. And no, it does not include giving everyone on the team a raise or more paid time off, even though after implementing this simple framework, raises will be a real possibility.

The only constantly appreciating assets in any pediatric dental practice are the leaders and the people they lead. The primary focus of any leader should be to elevate their leadership effectiveness and facilitate a positive culture of accountability in the practice. This is where many practice leaders tune out because they do not understand that leading more effectively and investing time in developing a positive team culture will help them get more done, tackle their never-ending to-do list,

and elevate the practice's success. Working harder in the short term does not create long-term success. Still, as leaders, we often let the urgent and usually unimportant take center stage instead of developing a team to help lift a greater load together.

Today is the day for a new approach! Instead of policing the team to take ownership of their role, the positive culture of accountability established by the leaders will weed out bad behavior and encourage effective implementation toward practice goals. Much like working out in the gym feels like work in the beginning, eventually, working out brings energy, peace, clarity, and, oh, those washboard abs. When a practice leader invests time intentionally to build the team culture more than once a year at a team outing, they begin to feel the momentum and support of the team to accomplish goals instead of pressure to make things happen on their own.

## Leadership Truth 1

The team will model what they see a leader do more than what a leader says.

This applies to big things like how feedback is given and how a leader handles challenges. However, it also applies to more minor things like cleaning things around the practice.

Teams reflect the leader's skills. Everybody wins when the leader improves.

Questions to ask: What behavior, action, or skill do I need to model better so my team improves?

## Leadership Truth 2

Leaders do not shield their team from the painful challenges of personal and professional growth. Instead, they stand beside them through the struggle, shoulder to shoulder, constantly casting the vision, applauding their effort, and correcting their mistakes. This approach alone builds a positive accountability culture.

What is the return on investing in leading a positive accountability culture? Employees working in a positive accountability environment experience:

- 70 percent more productivity
- 50 percent reduction in workplace errors
- 30 percent lower turnover
- 15-20 percent increase in revenue
- 25 percent increase in profit margin
- 35 percent higher customer satisfaction scores (loyalty and repeat business)

Before rushing past these statistics, what would a 30 percent reduction in turnover mean for the practice? What about a 25 percent increase in profit or a 35 percent increase in customer satisfaction?

If the benefits of creating a positive accountability culture are so impactful, why do so few practices develop great leaders and systems of accountability to elevate everyone's performance? For the same reason, most people know what is good for them in other areas of life, such as their health, marriage, or happiness, but they do not do it because the actions initially seem uncomfortable.

Why does accountability feel so uncomfortable for the people tasked with giving and receiving accountability when it benefits everyone? For many, accountability has primarily been associated with negative consequences or punishment. While this approach often gets results in the short term, there is a problem. The fear of making a mistake, negative consequences, and punishment deplete the one resource a leader needs from their team; to accomplish every production goal, effectively implement any new program or system, and create an ideal team culture.

That resource is called **discretionary effort**! When someone says they want to be a great or better leader, that means, "I want my team to want to show up, care as much as I do, and take ownership of our goals and outcomes. I want them to feel as excited about their job and the practice as I am as the owner or manager."

A leader must walk through three doors to create an accountability culture without diminishing discretionary effort. These three doors open to a better life for a leader and those they lead. Consistent implementation and accountability improve everything in life, not just business results.

Imagine walking up to a door. This is the first door to creating a positive accountability culture. Placing a hand firmly on the handle with anticipation and twisting to open it, the door is firmly locked.

## Leadership Truth 3

The first door to positive accountability is always locked, which is why so few people ever walk through.

To unlock the first door, practice leaders need the key of truth! Confronting reality is often uncomfortable for practice leaders because they must change to lead themselves and their team more effectively. Brian Moran, author of *The 12 Week Year*, says, “The barrier standing between you and the life you are capable of living is a lack of consistent execution. Effective execution will set you free. It is the path to accomplish the things you desire.”

Most leaders communicate their goals, and some communicate their expectations, yet few understand or feel comfortable holding a team accountable to inspire consistent implementation.

As a leader, what are the glaring areas where the practice would benefit from confronting reality instead of justifying a lack of consistency, walking on eggshells around certain personalities, or allowing negative gossip to spread? Armed with that uncomfortable truth, proceed through door #1.

DOOR  
• 1

### Provide a Clear Goal or Expectation

Employees love to perform well! Leaders should cultivate very clear objectives and goals with their team to increase the likelihood that their team can meet and exceed expectations. Involving the team in conversations around goals and expectations helps them feel there is a certain level of choice, which will increase their level of ownership of the outcome.

Suppose a team member has several opportunities for improvement. While training in all these areas may be necessary, picking one area to focus on and providing accountability will be most beneficial. Clarify the steps to achieve this goal and

establish a tangible deliverable by a reasonable date so the team members and the leader can celebrate the win.

Example: Instead of setting a goal to keep the schedule full, which is a team effort, work with the team or team member to identify the steps contributing to a full schedule. Break those steps down into specific actions to be accomplished. The leader’s goal should be to replace any vagueness with vision and any fear with skills that will support their successful completion by the expected deadlines or intervals.

DOOR  
• 2

### Give the Team a Choice in Behavioral Commitments

Most leaders miss a crucial step between setting a clear goal and expectation for the team and holding them accountable. Children teach parents that setting a goal or expectation for a child does not mean that the child agrees to behave that way. Much like a parent, a leader must ask their team members what behavioral commitments or actions they are committed to so that the leader can hold them accountable for commitments.

Example: Instead of the leader saying, “I expect the admin team to create reports, make calls, and follow up with unscheduled treatment.” How could the leader enlist the team’s commitment? A question may be a good place to start. A leader could ask, “Now that we know the actions that will help fill the schedule, what behaviors will you commit to achieving this result?”

Leaders can only hold the team accountable for their commitments, not the leader’s expectations!

***“You are what you consistently do. Excellence is not an act but a habit!” ~Aristotle***

Individuals with peer support are 8 times more likely to succeed at accomplishing their goals than those without it. Leaders who harness peer support to cultivate a culture of positive accountability often witness remarkable transformations within their teams. This could look like hygienists and assistants collaborating in pairs or small groups to review each other's work and set mutual goals. One practical approach could be holding monthly team meetings to celebrate successes and discuss challenges constructively. By highlighting peer contributions during meetings, leaders reinforce the importance of shared responsibility. This culture of collaborative accountability can drive the practice toward achieving more goals while enhancing workplace morale and cohesion.

Here are a few fast ways to infuse more peer support into the practice culture:

**Positive Buzz:** Encourage team members to recognize and acknowledge each other's contributions. This can be done through shout-outs in meetings or digital platforms.

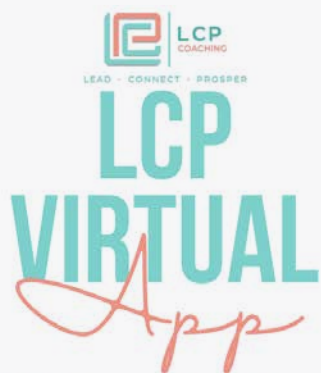
**Peer Support Champions:** Appoint individuals as peer support leaders or champions who can support initiatives and act as contact points for team members seeking advice or assistance.

**Highlight VIPs:** Every team member contributes to the practice's success, so everyone is a Very Important Person. Ensure that every team member knows how important their role is in achieving specific outcomes. Encourage every team member to participate in peer support activities, reinforcing a sense of shared responsibility and inclusion.

Now more than ever, employees have considerable employment opportunities and are less likely to stay in work cultures void of effective leadership and positive growth opportunities. Pediatric dental practice leaders have the privilege of creating a vision and culture so big that their team can see their future within that vision for an extended period of time.

To elevate the practice's positive accountability culture, a leader should reflect on which of the three doors must be unlocked and walked through. Are there some honest truths that need to be discussed? Does the team have clear goals and expectations? Has the team been included and given choices of behavioral commitments? Is a culture of peer support noticeable within the practice?

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