

The A-B-C'S Of Team Members

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As Jim Collins so clearly states in his book *Good to Great*, what matters most in moving a business from good to great is WHO is on the bus. Do you have the right people on and the wrong people off? And, if you don't have the wrong people off, what are you willing to do about it?

I have asked hundreds of Dentists what their biggest challenge is in their practices — 98% of the answers I hear are “managing the team”. Understandably so. You went to dental school because you wanted to do dentistry. How much training did you have in dental school on HR and leadership? So how do you know if you have the right team? A simple guideline would be the A-B-C's of Team members:

An “A” Team member:

- Does the job well
- Will get the job done without a doubt
- Willing to step out of their area to help others
- Leadership
- Accountability
- Consistent effort
- Good Attitude

A “B” Team member:

- Has a goal to become an A
- Shows effort
- Does only what is expected
- Has desire but needs coaching
- Does an A player job but not consistently
- Has desire but lacks experience
- Can be influenced positively or negatively

A “C” Team member:

- Slackers
- Paycheck only
- Content in letting others do their job
- Lacks desire to grow
- Blames others
- Not responsible

I think we would all agree that a C ranking means **SEE YOU LATER**. However, let's consider the B team member. Is this B team member a B because of a willingness issue or a training issue? Is

their resistance simply a lack of understanding? Could it be that we didn't train them properly?

Lack Of Training May Be The Culprit

I truly believe from working with hundreds of dental teams that the number one thing that holds practices back from success is a lack of training. We all seem to be so focused on getting the patient to say yes to the dentistry, yet many of our own team members don't even know what kind of dentistry we do, or why we do it.

I also find that dentistry is one of the worst professions for proper training of employees. We hire them and send them to the front desk, telling them that the “other girls” will fill them in and let them know what to do. But of course, the “other girls” are trying to do their jobs with a full schedule of patients and the phone ringing off the wall. We fill the new hygienist schedule and, of course, his/her day is spent at the chair *cleaning teeth*. Three months later we are angry because this hygienist is not “selling our dentistry”. We never consider the fact that he/she has not seen or been told about your dentistry or even had direction that you wanted them to talk about the exciting dentistry you have and could perform. This doesn't even consider the lack of cross training with our existing team members. The right hand often doesn't know what left hand is saying or doing. This results in a lack of confidence when answering patient's questions. The lack of confidence leads to a lack of motivation and so the cycle of stress continues — all from lack of training.

Why is there a lack of training? I believe it is because we are too busy being busy. We are working **IN** the practice and never working **ON** the practice. There may be a lack of training materials available. There may be a lack of a personnel policy manual, training DVD, or CD's. There may be a lack of checklist for our patient care systems. Most of all, there is usually a lack of team meetings where we implement Team to Team,

Team to Doctor, and Doctor to Team communication.

Tips On Effective Training

When training team members, **remember that people learn in different ways**. Make sure the time spent with training is worthwhile. Ask the team member if they learn best by seeing - looking at demonstrations and visuals - or by reading manuals and taking notes. It may be that they retain information best by “*doing*” - being hands on and doing the task after basic instructions. Perhaps it is hearing - listening and asking questions. Of course, it could be a combination of several different methodologies that work best for that individual.

Have a training plan — a timeline for the training depending on the position and duties. It would be best to train some positions on non-patient days as much as possible. Next, decide who is going to train the team member. To assure that nothing is being left out, have the trainer work from a checklist of duties that the trainee will be performing.

Evaluate progress and give constructive feedback — After the training, use that same checklist that was utilized to train the employee to evaluate each duty on a scale of one to five (one meaning the trainee has no understanding of that duty and five meaning they are fully proficient). Constructive feedback means always using “I” statements and not “You” statements. For example: “I have a concern about the scheduling system. I'm not sure we have been totally clear with how this system works.” Versus saying something like “You still have no idea about the scheduling system. You can't put these patients in these blocks.” Remember, we want to keep this team member motivated to continue to learn.

Cross Training Your Existing Team Members

Productive team meetings are the best way to cross train existing team members. However, make sure you have

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covered first things first. Doctors, have must share your clinical philosophies with your team members:

- If I were your team member, could I look in a mouth and know exactly what you would diagnose and why?
- As a hygienist, have you asked me to assess and educate the patient about restorative needs? Have you properly trained me on your restorative philosophy?
- As an administrator, I may be presenting treatment. If the patient asks me “why”, do I know? Do I know when you would do a bridge versus an implant? Do I know what kind of materials you believe in and why? Do I know why do you use the lab that you do when you could get it done for less?

Give your team the information they need so that they, in turn, can create value in your dentistry and better educate your patients. Has your team had proper computer training? Maybe the “guy’s/girl’s at the front” are doing twice as much work because the “guy’s/girl’s in the back” aren’t sharing the right information. It would take ONE team meeting to solve this problem but we keep doing what we are doing. If we really identified all the problems in the office, you might be surprised at how many solutions could be presented in a team meeting in the form of cross training.

If indeed you feel like you have invested both time and/or money in the proper training of a B team member and given the proper feedback, then this becomes a willingness issue. It may simply be the time to free up their future. Make sure you know your local employee laws and follow those guidelines to protect both the employer and employee. However, at this point, because you have done proper training, you can feel good about your decision and know that it is truly the best thing for the practice. That it is truly a business decision and not a personal decision.

In order for your practice to perform at its highest level, evaluate your A, B, and C team members. Quickly and properly dismiss the C team members. Consistently train and re-evaluate the B team members. Most important of all, nurture and praise your A team members.

As Director of the Dynamic Team Program at the Las Vegas Institute, Sherry Blair shares her more than 37 years of experience managing each and every system within the dental practice. Sherry has combined her acquired knowledge and personal experience to create an inspired, effective and motivated curriculum that refines the systems surrounding the patient’s total experience in a dental practice. Sherry’s extensive exposure to most forms of practice management and dental systems, as well as her strong focus on patient satisfaction, make her uniquely qualified to enhance the effects of any dental practice.

Plan to Attend:

“Helping the Team Understand the Business of Dentistry”

with Sherry Blair

Calgary, AB – October 22

Abbotsford, BC – October 23

(in conjunction with Fraser Valley Dental Society)

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