

# The TEXAS Meeting

# Preview

## **TeamFirst!™** **...The Connection Advantage**

By Risa Simon, CMC





## Risa Simon, CMC

### Team First!™ ...It's All About Connection, Not Perfection!

Thursday, May 10 • 1:30 PM - 4:30 PM  
Course Code #T49

Friday, May 11 • 8:30 AM - 11:30 AM  
Course Code #F67

If you're somewhat baffled by a loss of momentum from your best and your brightest, or you catch yourself wondering "where have all the good employees gone" — you're not alone! Over half the businesses in America are struggling with similar observations, resulting in hundreds of thousands of dollars in lost opportunity.

Paradoxically, this predicament is not about a scarcity of skilled employees, or an employee's self-perpetuated lack of interest, as one might suspect. More accurately, what can be perceived as an employee's lack of initiative, is most likely a behavioral outcome derived from an insufficiency within the organization. Considering both the cause and effect of this organizational void is somewhat intangible, it comes as no surprise that this insidious dilemma continues to be difficult to recognize or correct.

Regrettably, most organizations do not realize that they have the power to expand their "good employee pool" by simply leveraging a human connection with their people. This long overdue paradigm shift for investing in human capital is the very essence of what naturally influences ordinary employees to become extraordinary employees. More specifically, this shift helps employees feel more valued and appreciated, which ultimately improves performance, inspires initiative and secures long term employment.

#### Feeding Human Spirit

Oddly enough, business owners can devote weeks on end to structured training without ever realizing that their emphasis on perfection could very well be causing (if not exacerbating) an employee disconnection!

While the "how to's and must do's" are vitally important, they're "all for naught," if they don't include a pinch of appreciation, a dash of encouragement and a splash of trust delicately layered in between.

Simply put, the human spirit needs to be fed on a regular basis to perform like a well-oiled machine. The type of diet I'm referring to is not one that is digested through the intestinal track. For this is the type of sustenance that must be processed through the heart and soul to gain nutritional value.

The ingredient label on this emotionally intelligent diet includes appreciation, recognition and empowerment. These essentials enable individuals to place importance on their personal role in the grand scheme of things. As a result, employees start to feel that their personal contribution is as important as the work they perform, which encourages them to seek a higher purpose in all that they do.

Conversely, if a workforce is nutritionally deprived, the practice experiences an anemic struggle to perform. This occurs when oxygen deficient blood has to work too hard to make its rounds to the heart of the organization. Consequently, the practice flatlines as the team continues to lose momentum and the business experiences operational stagnation.

To avoid this down spiral effect, a consistent plan must be put into action from the get go. The plan must start with the belief that an organization's greatest asset is their people; and that the investment in their people must be as good as, if not better than, their investment in the tasks their people perform. For it is only those who feel honored, who will be capable of performing at an honorable level.

To hold a strong suit in this type of human connection may sound very basic or somewhat "fluffy" in theory. Yet, as we can see from the aftermath of its ubiquitous counterpart, it deserves to be recognized as one of the most influential management models on earth.

#### Perfectionism vs. Connectionism

In the dental profession, this concept can create great challenges for the multi-tasking dentist/business-owner. For example, the dentist wears the hat of a clinician, business owner, leader, and manager. While wearing the clinician hat, the doctor's inun-

*After all, if employees only hear about their faults and inefficiencies, the practice will only be reinforcing the incompetence of its people. In this type of environment employees (who were once capable of achieving greatness), are now inclined to simply align their performance to the beliefs of the organization — and nothing more.*

dated with the responsibility of treating patients and staying on schedule. This leaves little, if any, time to lead, manage or motivate the true heroes of the organization — the team!

To make matters worse, the doctor/clinician has been trained to think, perform and even breathe like a perfectionist. Consequently, any hope for a heartfelt connection is lost in the demand for perfection.

It's one thing to have high standards and quite another to have a high regard for the people who are capable of upholding those standards. Employees who sense they are held in high regard are far more likely to reciprocate in-kind. This reciprocal process is essential for building and sustaining trust, which is the key to securing mutually beneficial relationships.

In the perfectionist role, it is easier (and often quicker) to point out what's not working, then to point out what is working. After all, it's become habit. Assuming the practice has far more going right (than it has going wrong); in essence, it would be quicker and easier to point out what's wrong.

If you are indeed seeking the easy road, why not consider the easiest route? Undeniably, it's a whole lot easier (and far more enjoyable) to point out a few great things (in hopes that those great things will be repeated), then to reinforce the downside of the organization.

Of course, I am not suggesting that we ignore problems. I'm simply putting more emphasis on the upside to influence repeated "greatness." In the grand scheme of things, there needs to be a healthy balance of focus of both sides. After all, if employees only hear about their faults and inefficiencies, the practice will only be reinforcing the incompetence of its people. In this type of environment employees (who were once capable of achieving greatness), are now inclined to simply align their performance to the beliefs of the organization — and nothing more.

This negative cycle can take a tremendous toll on a practice by encouraging employees to disengage from their work. Disengagement is what provokes employees to start questioning their decision as to why they ever accepted the job in the first place. This can move them to passively seek another job, or at least threaten to do so. Once the new job search begins, (whether it's only a fantasy in their mind, or not), they've already started to emotionally detached their hearts from the organization.

### **Feedback: The Breakfast of Champions!**

As a proactive measure, the disengagement process can be "headed off at the pass" through a consistent flow of supportive feedback. Supportive feedback is a vital building block in relationship-capital, as it feeds the human spirit with the spoken or written word, or even body language, by communicating just how much an individual is valued.

Most leaders don't realize the incredible rate of return feedback offers, as it relates to the output of their people. For example, employees who sense they are valued will automatically step-up their confidence to perform at a level congruent with those expressions.

On the other hand, if employees sense unworthiness, unworthy contributions will prevail. That said, it is critically important to emote value, confidence and appreciation as a means of encouraging individuals to advance themselves (and the organization), by the light of their own brilliance.

### **Acknowledging Precise Behavior**

Great leaders and managers make it their mission to acknowledge precise behavior beyond generic rhetoric. For example, "good job!" is simply not specific enough to reinforce a job performed well. After all, ending your day with the words "good job" may fall upon the ears of individuals who have just finished a personal phone call or spent their last 30 minutes ignoring others who needed help before clocking out.

A more effective approach would be to wait until something specific happens and then comment on it. For example, you might say: "Way to go by getting full case acceptance on Martha, Judy!" or, "Great job filling that last minute opening Betty!" These comments are far more redeemable for a repeat performance of similar greatness.

Avoid "drive-by" feedback. Giving feedback "on the fly" is not enough. If it was important enough to acknowledge, take the time to recognize it properly! While words are important, eye contact and body language can communicate even more. When expressions are congruent with the words spoken, the significance of your message is more accurately received. This step increases the significance of the deposit made into the employee's emo-

tional bank account. Be mindful of intention and sincerity in your deposits; for when a lack of genuineness is perceived, serious emotional ramifications will prevail.

For those who have difficulty giving feedback in person, try a personal handwritten note or even an e-mail. Written communication can often be more effective than verbal communication, particularly when the sender tends to communicate better with the written word.

When addressing your employees, hold them in the light of an “owner-equal partner” so they can begin to truly partner with you to grow the business. Of equal importance, discipline yourself to stop calling them “staff.” While most of us never think about it, the true definition of an employee is a servant or subordinate. Surely our goal is not to separate our people as an inferior class or phonetically refer to them (as what may sound like) an infectious disease! Instead, refer to them as one of your valued “associates.” In doing so, you’ll be amazed at the increase in accountability those references hold.

Group feedback can also be used in conjunction with individual feedback. Group feedback can include illustrations of practice trends on monitors or graphs. To super-charge the effect, group feedback can be personalized with a heartfelt message written across the top of a graph. For example, the words “I couldn’t have done this without my incredibly talented team! My most sincere and heartfelt thanks to all of you for all that you do to help our business grow.” This is the type of feedback that secures tremendous “relationship-capital” with your team!

Employers can also help employees differentiate their value by praising superior performance, rather than acknowledging day-to-day tasks; and by honoring every triumph, particularly collaborative efforts. This is how world-class leaders build world-class organizations.

### **What’s Holding Your Practice Back?**

You may be wondering if this management style is so rewarding, why haven’t more practitioners taken this management philosophy on? Our experience shows that while business owners value this ideology, they simply lack the emotional intelligence or experience to consistently function within this management model without a coach (or trusted advisor) to stay the course.

For those half-heartedly thinking they can apply an unpredictable splattering of these principles without casualties — a word of caution here: Inconsistent or disingenuous use of this information could be harmful to the health of the organization.

The TeamFirst™ model is an ongoing journey designed for the “greater good.” It requires an information exchange that might even cause leaders to feel vulnerable. Those vulnerabilities might include the fear of losing control by validating wage increases. “Gosh doctor, you keep telling me how well I’m performing, I think I deserve a raise!” That said, it is important to only praise performance that is worthy of being praised. Of equal importance, compensation should be based on merit, not term of employment.

Nonetheless, if the request for an increase is valid because the individual is responsible for increasing revenue or profits, (or, at the very least, has the potential to do so), your fear has become your worst enemy! For this type of fear could very well be the core source of what’s holding a practice back!

### **The Boomerang Advantage**

I am reminded of the farmer who was interviewed by a reporter for winning gold medals year after year for the best tasting corn in the county. The farmer proudly unveiled that his advantage comes from sharing his gold medal seeds with his neighboring crop growers. His response astonished the reporter, so the reporter asked the farmer “how could that be if your neighbors are your crop competitors?” The farmer wisely explained, “when the wind blows, so does the pollen. If my neighbors were growing inferior crops, they would cross-pollinate with mine!”

Indeed, everything we share cross-pollinates in-kind. Perhaps we can all learn from the farmer’s strategy, by understanding that the generous gift of empowerment provides an incredible boomerang advantage for the giver. Follow this universal law and you will not be disappointed, for the connection you inspire with your team first, is without question, one of the most untapped competitive advantages in the global marketplace today.

### **About the Author:**

*Risa Simon, CMC, is a published author, certified management consultant and nationally recognized speaker who will be presenting “TeamFirst™ ... It’s All About Connection, Not Perfection!” at the Texas Dental Meeting in San Antonio, on May 10 and 11, 2007. For more information on Risa’s in office consulting services, telephone coaching, teambuilding seminars or her newly released book: TeamFirst™ — visit: [www.simonaysolutions.com](http://www.simonaysolutions.com) or call (480) 575 -9353.*