

Together Everyone Achieves More!

by Risa Simon, cmc

**“Coming together is a beginning.
Keeping together is progress.
Working together is success.”**

— Henry Ford

Most businesses yearn to attract “good people” to help them run their operations more effectively. Unfortunately, what they fail to realize is that good people, working independent of one another - are simply not good enough to ensure growth or profitability for an organization. Individuals must combine their talent and skill in an effort to strengthen the organization as a whole.

While this sounds fairly straightforward and rather simple to achieve, it appears that most teams relentlessly struggle with this concept. The fact is that most teams are made up of imperfect human beings who inherently contribute to dysfunctional behavior. According to Patrick Leoncioni, author of “The Five Dysfunctions of a Team,” dysfunctions can actually tempt individuals to corrupt team synergy - just to stay ahead.

Even if this doesn't sound familiar within your place of business, you may be surprised to find an underlying layer of tension exists back at the office - particularly when the team hasn't developed a strong level of trust. Leoncioni claims teamwork is impossible without trust. I couldn't agree more. Team members must have confidence in the intentions of their group, or they'll never participate as a team. However, when intentions are perceived for the greater good, there is no reason to withhold, exclude, or gossip about others. When intentions are focused on mutual benefits, the team reaches out to ensure that everyone succeeds.

The best way to gain trust in any situation is to start by exposing vulnerabilities. This is the most important action a leader can take to encourage team members to become vulnerable. Leaders

must, however, demonstrate their own vulnerability first to create a safe playing field for all.

Appropriate vulnerabilities to share within the work place might include job weaknesses, skill deficiencies, interpersonal shortcomings, and the ability to admit to making an error. In other words, teammates must be willing to reveal their true selves to one another, without fear of reprisal.

Needless to say, exposing vulnerabilities is almost unheard of in this competitive marketplace, particularly when self-advancement takes precedence. When this is the case, individuals will tend to spend their time calculating disingenuous or political moves, rather than concentrating on their connection and accountability to one another.

There are detrimental costs when these destructive instincts cannot be “turned off.” When there is a lack of trust, even your most valued employees can end up sabotaging their group, regardless of their years on the job, past track record, or management degrees. This process wastes an inordinate amount of time and energy managing dysfunctional behaviors, which keeps the group from reaching collective goals.

While cognizant of the need for help, teammates will hesitate to ask for it when they lack trust (or “offer it up”) - particularly when its outside their area of responsibility. This lack of support causes individuals to jump to conclusions about the intentions of others which reinforces their desire to work independently.

To overcome this dysfunction, teammates must be willing to share an in-depth understanding of one another. Revealing information about their families, up-bringing or unique challenges which contributed to their adult personalities, can provides insight to individual character. This exercise is more conducive to an off-site, retreat-like setting, without distractions of the work environment.

During this process, teammates can

esteem their partners by identifying the single most important contribution each member brings to the table. This exercise can also include one or two behaviors the team feels could be improved (or eliminated) as means of strengthening the group as a whole.

In addition, a personality profile like Myers-Briggs, DISC, or David Kerisey's “Character Temperament Typing” would be an excellent exercise to complete this process of understanding one another. Understanding personality or temperament types becomes vital to the

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success of any business, particularly in dentistry, since the work environment positions individuals so close to one another.

Character-typing identifies one's ability to lead and allows individuals to put their strengths to their best possible use. This awareness can also help individuals take ownership of their shortcomings with a better understanding of how these shortcomings can stifle team effort.

Understanding differences in temperament can also help you recognize why people are different and why they approach their tasks in a different manner than you do. Understanding these differences honors individual uniqueness, rather than allowing differences to be a source of aggravation and dissention.

Progress is also hindered by a lack of trust. When teammates aren't sure how their partners feel about them, they become reluctant to voice their opinions or simply debate whatever is put on the table. This isn't all bad, if managed properly. For example, we now know that great relationships often require productive communication or even passionate conflict. I personally believe that when conflict exists, an overt “breakdown” must

occur in order to “breakthrough” for progress. Hence, without passionate, productive conflict (or debate), the best possible solutions cannot be born.

This may require the leader to begin with what author Randall Tobias, author of “Putting The Moose on the Table” refers to as, taking that which is known - (but not disclosed), and putting it “out

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there” for productive resolution. This process courage to look at the issues with genuine desire to work through them for productive closure.

By engaging in productive conflict and revealing individual perspectives and opinions, a team can commit to change. Commitment requires clarity of action, sharing of opinions and insights, and most importantly, being heard! While everyone may not have the same opinions - and

most are likely to have a wide variance of perspectives - the opportunity to have your feelings considered may be the single most important ingredient for a genuine “buy-in”. Conversely, when caught at a standstill, the process of agreeing to disagree may be the only possible avenue to retain respect and momentum.

Without commitment, a team cannot begin to collaborate towards group accountability. To hold one another accountable, the team must have complete clarity and agreement on the precise expectations of each team member. For example, team members need to know who needs to deliver what and by when - for ambiguity can be rather mischievous in the process of collaborative teamwork. That said, team members need to regularly communicate their performance objectives and outcomes.

Team incentives also can encourage a higher level of team accountability, particularly when they are used above and beyond individual praise and acknowledgement.

Be mindful of individuals that lack the

desire to strengthen team accountability. Individuals who are not being held accountable for collaborative efforts will turn their attention to their own needs, sabotaging the remaining functioning parts. Therefore, it is essential to always have a relentless focus on team outcomes. To that end, results should not be measured by revenue, or profit alone. Ideally, rewards are designed to honor collaborative actions, as well as human behaviors which significantly contribute to bottom-line results.

The key to achieving a truly functional team does not come from mastering sophisticated theory, but rather from embracing uncommon levels of human dynamics. Encourage your team members to share their vulnerabilities. Invite them to build a strong level of trust with one another. Allow them to engage in healthy debate. Let them feel heard. Encourage them to “buy-in” and commit to a plan of action. By doing so, you will inspire a united front of individuals who are determined to see their group succeed. Their determination to collaborate with one another for the ‘greater good’ can become an organizations most competitive advantage for increasing profitability.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Risa Simon is a certified management consultant, published author, and professional speaker, holding professional memberships with the National Speakers Association, the Institute of Management Consultants, the Academy of Dental Management Consultants, and OSAP. Ms. Simon holds a teaching degree from the University of California at Berkeley, and a management-consulting degree from the Institute of Management, USA. She also serves as a consultant to the ADA’s Counsel on Dental Practice and to the Arizona School of Dentistry and Oral Health. She is a former editor of the ADA magazine, Dental Teamwork. As the founder and senior consultant for Simon Says Solutions (the management-consulting division of her parent company, Simon Says Seminars, Inc., based in Scottsdale, Arizona), her company offers seminars, consulting, and coaching programs to achieve and sustain team harmony, operational efficiency, and practice profitability. For more information on her coaching and speaking programs, visit www.simonsaysolutions.com or call (480) 575 9353 or risa@simonsaysolutions.com.

