

Individuals play, but teams win

Learn how to turn a group of individuals into a team to be proud of. **Lina Craven** shows you how with eight key principles

What does it take to build the ultimate team? Do they actually exist? Why is it that so many teams fail to reach their true potential?

It is said that all teams are groups but not all groups are teams. What separates the two is interdependence. A true team is focused on a common purpose - team members support one another and enhance each other's work. Andrew Carnegie was spot on when he said, 'Teamwork is the ability to work together towards a common vision. It's the fuel that allows common people to obtain uncommon results.'

I know that achieving the ultimate team is possible because when I was a dental nurse many moons ago in America, I was part of an 'ultimate team' and what made us great was our leader! Dr Tagawa and his partner had a very clear vision and they knew exactly what was needed from each one of us to ensure the practice achieved its desired results, and in turn each one of us knew that every challenge we faced was an opportunity for personal, professional and practice growth.

Practices with a motivated, focused and empowered team produce excellent results where patient satisfaction is high and practitioners realise increased financial rewards. Achieving it is not pie-in-the-sky but it does require the complete buy-in from the whole team. Based on my own experience of being a part of a high-performing team and my observations as a consultant to practices, here are my key principles to the creation of an ultimate team.

1. Provide clear leadership

Leaders set the tone for the practice. Do not confuse being the boss with being a leader. Effective leaders lead by positive example. Successful teamwork starts



at the top with leaders who provide strategic vision and establish team goals. Effective leaders clearly define their vision and share it with their team to establish a common purpose.

2. Define the practice's shared values

Shared values help to build an effective team, and to establish its culture, conduct, rules and policies. Any successful relationship can only survive if values are shared, believed and agreed - values like honesty, respect, integrity, commitment to each other, commitment to the practice success, etc. The key is to ensure the entire team agrees and is prepared to work by them. The world's finest flight performance team (The Blue Angels - United States Navy) says that, 'without shared values, peak performance isn't possible and that a team's values must align with its purpose, mission, and actions.'

3. Communicate effectively

Every team member from the leader to the cleaner must learn to communicate clearly and effectively. Successful relationships are built on positive, honest and open feedback. Is information shared openly and honestly in your team? Does gossip or negative chatter exist in your practice? Team members must learn to address concerns, deal with conflict and accept responsibility for other team member's success. When conflict occurs it must be dealt with honestly, directly, and openly as soon as possible and in line with your adopted values. Foster positive attitudes and creative thinking - attitudes can either make or break the team dynamics so there is no place for negative people.

4. Empower individuals to generate success

Do all your team members have clear

and up-to-date job descriptions? Are they all qualified to undertake their roles? Are there written procedures for every area of the practice? I often hear team members say they are not sure who is responsible, or they don't have a job description, or they were promised training when they started but it has been too busy to happen.

Empowerment results from clearly defined roles and practice procedures and a shared understanding of one another's roles. Cross training increases efficiency and makes each person more productive and valuable to the team.

Each team member is a cog in your wheel of success yet is often under-utilised to his/her full potential and so becomes bored or complacent. Dr Tagawa believed in providing the best training for his staff. He recognised that he may lose some individuals who desired greater career progression than the practice could offer but he knew that those who remained would perform at their peak and more than justify his investment.

5. Prepare for show time!

Every morning as part of our commitment to the team in Dr Tagawa's practice, we would meet 10 minutes prior to the start of the day. Kathy, the head receptionist, had a simple but effective system to update us with vital information: how many patients, special recognitions like patient birthdays, identifying difficult patients, where staff were expected to be (from the rota), anyone off that day etc. It only took five minutes for the update and the other five was to review the day before; what worked well, what didn't. It focused us for the day ahead.

6. Choose your attitude!

Walt Disney said: 'You can dream, create, design and build the most wonderful place in the world but it requires people to make the dream a reality.' Imagine a girl visiting Disney World and hoping to see Cinderella but when she encounters her, Cinderella is chewing gum and has a 'can't do, won't do' attitude. Is Cinderella playing her role? It takes the right attitude and a focused commitment from every

In brief: Eight steps to the ultimate team

1. Provide clear leadership
2. Define the practice's shared values
3. Communicate effectively
4. Empower individuals to generate success
5. Prepare for show time!
6. Choose your attitude!
7. Be consistent
8. Learn to give praise and recognition/celebrate success!

member of the team to turn the vision into a reality. When that patient your practice dreads is due to arrive, how do you all respond; with an 'I will not take any nonsense from this patient today!' or 'I'll show her who's right!?' When we choose the right attitude and choose to stay true to our purpose, we will help others to do the same.

7. Be consistent

Consistency is critical to creating the ultimate team – it creates credibility and trust. Ken Blanchard and Sheldon Bowles wrote in their book, *Raving Fans*, 'customers allow themselves to be seduced into becoming raving fans only when they know they can count on you time and time again'. This is also true for teams – just replace the word customers with team members!

I often hear people say things like, 'one day we're instructed to do something and the next day it becomes something else.' If you want to be part of the ultimate team, be consistent.

8. Learn to give praise and recognition/celebrate success!

It is said that what motivates individuals the most is recognition – a pat on the back or a word of praise for a job well done. Embrace this principle and although it may feel awkward at first, if it is done often enough it becomes a habit. Sam Walton, founder of Walt-Mart stores said: 'Appreciate everything your associates do for the business. Nothing else can quite substitute for a few well-chosen, well-timed, sincere words of praise. They're absolutely free and worth a fortune.'

It's worth the effort

Building the ultimate team does represent a challenge but once achieved, it is hugely rewarding. There is no point implementing one principle in isolation – it's like baking a cake without the eggs. After 20 years I still remember and thank Dr Tagawa for his passion for team excellence and for allowing me to be part of his ultimate team! And as Henry Ford once said, 'Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.' [PD](#)

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Lina Craven is the founder and director of Dynamic Perceptions. Over the past 25 years Lina Craven has assisted dental practices to realise their vision of success through the achievement of a customer-driven culture that focuses on delivering an exceptional patient journey. Lina's qualifications and experience as an orthodontic therapist, treatment coordinator (TC) and practice manager in the US have given her a unique insight into the day-to-day practical problems faced by dental practices. She combines her hands-on knowledge with years of consultative experience to assist UK and European practices to achieve something special. For more information on Dynamic Perceptions' workshops in London, Leeds and Birmingham from March, visit www.orthodontic-management.com.