

Sandy Roth's

Communique!

Unique and Challenging Concepts from ProSynergy Dental Communications

#95: *What Is A Team?*

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What is a team?

What makes a group of people a team? When I ask this question, I usually hear something along these lines: They help each other out when they are behind. They are all equal. They get along. They're just like family. I propose that a team is quite different from those superficial descriptions. Of course, people who are part of a team are helpful to one another, but they are not necessarily equal (more about that later). And aspiring to "get along" may suppress the creativity which comes from healthy conflict. Moreover, a team is definitely not a family.

When ProSynergy was conceived, our first program was *Teamwork*, the goal of which was to help a dentist and staff become more effective in their mutual efforts. We worked with nearly 100 client practices in this initial program, and learned how this notion of team

was then understood. We often met groups of people who called themselves a team. They looked for new employees who were "team-oriented," and they held lots of team meetings. But they were not teams. Their emphasis on harmony and sameness prohibited their growth and success in a business which was demanding innovation and creative substance.

As a result, we realized that the first step was to develop a common understanding of a team. Here is our definition:

A team is a deliberately chosen group of individuals, each of whom has skills and abilities which are valuable to the practice, who come together in order to accomplish a commonly held goal or purpose that none could achieve on his or her own.

This definition is intended to be precise in a number of ways. First, please note the deliberately chosen descriptive. When hiring has not

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been intentional, precise, and thoughtful, employees may have been hired somewhat randomly, without regard to how their abilities, skills, talents, beliefs and values will contribute to the success of the practice. These staff may accomplish tasks, but they may not necessarily contribute in meaningful ways to the overall purpose of the practice.

The second notable point is that each person must come with skills and abilities which are valuable to the practice. Too often, hiring is done either in a panic or to plug a warm body into a hole left by a hasty departure. Because the practice is busy and the dentist and team need help quickly, people can be hired without regard to the relevance or development of their skills. The biggest indicator of this is the statement: "she has potential." This is a euphemism for "she isn't able to do the job yet, but we are hoping she will develop in the future." At worst this is delusionary; at best, it is simply wishful thinking. Your patients won't pay for potential, and you shouldn't either.

The third point of this definition is very important: who come together in order to accomplish a commonly held goal or purpose. Now this is the critical piece. A team must be orga-

nized around a mutually-owned purpose or goal, and if this purpose isn't clarified and communicated regularly by the leader/s of the practice, the efforts of the individuals will lack focus and impact. Once the purpose has been communicated, the process of coalescing around that goal is what we call team building. The process of implementing the answers to the following questions transforms a good staff into a powerful team:

*What must we do individually and collectively to accomplish the goal of this business?

*How can our unique gifts and talents be brought to bear in pursuit of this purpose?

*How can our differences in perspective and style help us see things we might otherwise overlook?

*What have we not yet considered?

*What "successes" might be standing in the way of our growth?

*What problems are really symptoms which will guide us to new opportunities and learning?

In the next two issues, I will present an overview of two important aspects of team: Trust and "Who is the boss?" In the mean time, I encourage you to begin asking the questions I've outlined above. Perhaps you will discover that you have a staff that is ready to become a team.