BUILDING AND MANAGING THE IDEAL DENTAL PRACTICE TEAM

SPEAR®

Spear Education provides dental continuing education for striving dentists that are dedicated to the pursuit of clinical excellence in dentistry

CONTENTS

HOW TO FIND AND KEEP YOUR DENTAL DREAM TEAM

BY COURTNEY LAVIGNE, D.M.D

Losing a key team member unexpectedly earlier this year has led to countless hours over the last few months searching for her replacement. I initially hired a temporary replacement when I wasn't sure if my team member would be returning, and after deciding that she wouldn't, the temp has given our office the luxury of taking our time to find the best person for our practice. The interviewing process has taught me a lot about what keeps team members happy, and what causes them to make the decision to move on.

Starting my practice from scratch three years ago has caused me to endure the hiring process on quite a few occasions as we've grown. I've got it down to a science at this point in order to avoid countless hours of wasted in-person interviews or phone conversations. I'll share with you the system I've arrived at through trial and error.

Interviewing candidates for your dental team

I start the interviewing process by posting ads that request a resume and cover letter. This is the first step of the weeding out. I'd say that two of three people that send their resume don't send a cover letter along with it. If I get a resume that seems appealing, I then send the candidate three questions to answer:

1/ What systems do you use to keep yourself organized?

2/ Tell me about a time that you were in over your head and how you handled it.

3/ Describe yourself in 140 characters or less!

At this point I'd say only half of those I send the questions to respond. Of those that do, another half have had the incredible fortune to never fall into a situation where they've felt in over their head! So before I've even hopped on a call, I'm down to approximately 7.5 percent of the initial applicants that applied to a job posting.

Once I've received answers to those questions that catch my attention, I set up a phone interview. I set up a time to have the applicant call me, rather than the other way around. Although most of the applicants I've vetted for the call take the position seriously by this point, some don't call on time, and some don't call at all. I've gotten emails the following day apologizing for forgetting, subsequently asking to reschedule. If the phone interview goes well, I'll have the person come to the office to meet the team and take a tour of our space. By this point in the process you may be thinking that I've created an incredibly cumbersome system, but it actually cuts out a huge amount of wasted face-to-face time

.For those candidates I meet in person that show up professionally-dressed and fit the bill, I'll have them return for a working interview. I make sure to have them spend lunch with my team, and I have each team member spend time with them when I'm not around.

I make sure to have them spend lunch with my team, and I have each team member spend time with them when I'm not around.

Though my process may or may not be useful to you, the most interesting thing I've found in my recent search for a team member is the consistency in why people leave. With rare exception, it's not because of money, and it's not because of their commute. It's not any of the usual suspects. I've been overwhelmed by the amount of applicants wanting to leave their current offices for two major reasons.

REASON #1

They feel unappreciated.

REASON #2

They don't feel a sense of camaraderie.

It may be that the online presence of our office through Instagram, Facebook, and our overall reputation sets us apart as a small, tight-knit team (which we are). If that's the case, then I may have a skewed applicant pool. But if that's not the case, team members go home after a long work day and start searching for a new job because of two major reasons we may not be aware of.

Keeping your dental team happy

Many of the people I've been speaking with feel like they go above and beyond for their "boss" without recognition. They feel that working late, through lunch, or answering emails on the weekends is expected, but not appreciated. Most of them are looking for a thank you, or a verbal recognition that they're valued as a key team member. Multiple applicants have gone as far as to mention that they'll take a pay cut in order to find increased personal fulfillment in the workplace.

The other major complaint I've heard from applicants is the lack of communication and overall disorganization of their current offices. No one knows what his or her job is or who is accountable, and the hard workers end up picking up the pieces while the other team members "coast by." Many of the applicants have commented during their working interview about how nice it is that we have a morning huddle to get on the same page, and how impressed they are that I communicate directly with the team. I'm not sure how many dentists are hiding in the corner in silence, but it seems that the percentage is far greater than I would have expected!

So what can we do to keep the team members we value? How can we build camaraderie that makes it unappealing to look anywhere beyond the doors of our office for work fulfillment?

Here are some tips I've found useful in letting each of my team members know they're indispensable:

1/ Keep a mental or written list of things that the team member enjoys.

If they mention where they get their hair cut and when they have an appointment, call ahead and pay for it if they've been killing it at work. If you see things that remind you of that person, like a t-shirt or a card, buy them and keep them for a day or week when they go above and beyond.

2/ Thank them in front of patients.

If a patient mentions that you and your assistant work well together, let them know that you feel privileged to work with them. Comment, "I know, she's the best, isn't she?" Go out of your way to ask the patient how they were taken care of, and pump that team member up when the patient has nice things to say. Every time I walk into the hygiene room for an exam, I ask the patient if their hygienist is taking good care of them. When they respond with, "of course" or "she always does," I'll respond with something like, "I'm lucky I get to work with her every day".

3/ Say thank you one-on-one.

While it's easy to ask a team member to stay late after work to discuss something that isn't going well, it's hard to remember to keep them a few minutes after to praise them. It's amazing how much a sit down to let them know how impressed you've been with their work will mean to them.

Here are some tips to build camaraderie:

1/ Lead by example.

If you complain or talk badly of a co-worker, you can't expect your team members not to. Always start the morning huddle on a positive note, and end the day with a positive, too. Positivity should be the bookends of their work experience, even when you're tired, stressed, or angry inside.

2/ Spend time together outside of the office.

We are trying to plan a get-together every other month outside of the office. We rotate who plans the event and I give them a budget to work within. This month we went to a lake for the day and went tubing, water-skiing, and floating.

3/ Have reviews.

I give each team member a formal yearly review where I have standardized paperwork and ratings that we go through, but I also do six-month reviews to "check in." This is a time to ask team members their level of happiness, what barriers to their happiness exist in the workplace, and what suggestions they have to improve our flow. If you don't check in often enough, small problems can snowball into big ones before you even knew they existed.

This most recent round of hiring has been a grueling one, but I've learned a lot in the process. I hope some of what I've learned can translate and be helpful in your own practices, whether it's through the hiring process, or in keeping the team you've got!

PEOPLE MANAGEMENT IN THE DENTAL PRACTICE THE DISNEY WAY

BY AMY MORGAN

Many years ago, I was lucky enough to have worked at Disney World as a "cast member." When I later became a consultant/trainer, I carried that very special work experience with me. As a result, I do believe that I look at patients, dental teams and dentists through Disney eyes.

It has always been my desire to spread the Disney magic in dentistry because there's no reason why we can't make every dental experience magical as well. That is why it was an awesome thrill to create an opportunity for 130 Pride Alumni to participate in Disney Institute's people management training (customized for dentistry) this past summer.

Part of our training included a behind-the-scenes field trip at the Magic Kingdom to observe Disney leadership in action. The resulting experience exceeded all our expectations, leaving us raving fans committed to spreading the Disney vision. It is my hope that every dental team member strives to accomplish that level of satisfaction every day with every patient and with each other. If that was the case, we'd see higher levels of case acceptance, reduced no-shows and cancellations and deep loyalty and commitment from all.

Our training opened with a quote from Walt Disney that I saw repeated in every training facility at the Kingdom:

> "You can dream, create, design and build the most wonderful place in the world, but it requires people to make the dream a reality."

Now, if that's not the bottom line truth, then I'm Minnie Mouse!

It isn't Space Mountain or the latest Disney movie that makes the magic, just like it isn't the implant crown preparation or periodontal maintenance visit that makes the magic. It's you, your team and your culture that engages people … or not. One of the things we learned during our training is that out of the 60,000 employees that work in Orlando, a huge majority make between $6.00 and $8.00 as an hourly wage.

Now, how many times have dentists complained to me saying, "you can't expect me to get magic out of my staff at these wages," or, "the hiring pool is limited!" Disney does it. I received a note from one of our female clients, Dr. Lisa Ference of Clifton, New Jersey, who participated in the Disney management training with us.
She wrote:

> "The message regarding the importance of our practice culture, the significance of communication, clear expectations and accountability and the value of having a clear vision reinforced all the training we have been receiving … I was amazed that, whether a business of six or 60,000, the same basic principles will lead a team to success!"

I challenge you to take a visit to any Disney property and find a staff member that isn't personifying the culture, because those staff members are few and far between. But I bet I could find a few hostage team members in your practice.

One of the interesting things that we got to see on our Disney odyssey was that it made no difference whether you are an executive for the company or a bus boy in one of the park concessions - you are expected to deliver the same basic "guest" customer service. To prove it, we looked for anyone in the Kingdom with a blue badge, which indicates they are an executive in the corporate structure. Every executive we spotted with a blue badge also had an apparatus to pick up garbage in the park! Every single custodian we saw was also empowered to serve their guests with information and relationship building.

Do you demonstrate your leadership by, literally and figuratively, picking up the garbage? Do you empower your least-experienced, least-trained staff member to consider guests first, before a job description task? The example in our training highlighted the bakers from the Main Street Bake Shop. We observed them out on the street taking pictures with children and chatting with guests. Our facilitator pointed out: "Shouldn't they be baking?" and then countered with: "That's not the Disney way; yes they bake, but their first goal is to surprise and delight."

Now tell the truth: have you ever heard a hygienist chatting amiably with one of your patients and deep within your heart, you said, “Why is she chatting when she should be doing the prophy or supporting clinical alternatives? Why is she having fun on my dime?” Now, ma’am, what would Walt Disney say?

Another aspect of the Disney training that made me feel a lot better about our own many mistakes and failures is that when you study customer service, whether it is Disney, Nordstrom or Ritz Carlton service, it is easy to get overwhelmed by the size and depth of these organizations and feel humbled by what looks like flawless performance. One of the most endearing quotes I heard at Disney was: “We strive for pixie dust and sometimes we get pixie mud.”

That made the Disney initiatives that much more human and genuine because you can’t expect 60,000 cast members to always be on their game. Disney would have a flawed system if they didn’t have provisions to address the unlikely event of a water landing. Herman Melville said, “only the mediocre are at their best all the time.”

This reinforced a deep, profound lesson for me personally: expecting brilliance from your team is not possible, is not fair and doesn’t really promote the brilliance that you so desire. Every customer service step you take forward can and will result in some failure … and according to Disney, it’s ok!

So now that you are all as excited about the Disney way as I am, what is the first step that needs to be taken for you to bring magic to your office? The step zero (before you can even begin this process) has to do with creating your own unique “corporate culture.”

Per Disney standards, a corporate culture is “the system of values and beliefs an organization holds that drives actions and behaviors and influences relationships.”

There are four components in creating a successful culture. You create that culture by:

- Design (versus one that just happens)
- Definition (rather than one that is open to individual interpretations)
- Being clear to all (versus one that is vague)
- Being goal-oriented (versus lacking purpose)

I challenge you to ask your team and patients what their interpretation of your culture is. If you get different responses, blank stares or inconsistent messages, then that is where you must start.

“The Disney culture, and maintaining it, is still my number one priority,” said Michael Eisner.

Once you have the culture all you need to do (sounds so simple) is continuously reinforce the culture, select the right fit talent, train for consistent quality and communicate to inform and inspire and always create an environment of care. Lee Cockerell, Executive VP of Operations for Disney, sums it up best: “There are hundreds of roles at the Walt Disney World Resort, but there is only one purpose for all of us and that is to make sure that every guest that comes to Walt Disney World has the most fabulous time of his or her life.”

All of this can sound empty if in expecting what we expect; not every aspect of the organization supports and personifies these important concepts. Much to our surprise, we learned that there is even a Disney way to make a Peanut Butter and Jelly sandwich that has been proven to satisfy guests more than the standard way. Would you like the secret? We discovered that Disney trains their line cooks to put peanut butter on both sides of the bread so that the jelly in the middle never seeps out on one side. Now for me, if a mega-corporation like Disney goes to the depth of specifying how a peanut butter sandwich should be made, it would be really easy for any dentist and her team to go to that same depth of detail.

If you are feeling overwhelmed by even taking the first step, let me help. When we were behind the scenes in the catacombs of the Kingdom, we were introduced to a new pilot training program that we were cautioned was not open to public training yet because they had not gotten enough results to endorse it. Of course, being me, I took all the material on this program with me because it stated so eloquently the pure, basic fundamentals of what it takes to create a culture based on service and leadership.

Every one of those bullets applies to every single staff member in your practice. Does your dental assistant (whether she is in sterilization, passing you instruments or conducting a patient debrief) project a positive image? Is she always courteous and respectful? Does she stay in character, and what is that character? Is she a one-dimensional clinician or a three-dimensional dental team member whose primary purpose is to serve? Does she always go above and beyond?

Once again, does your appointment coordinator demonstrate her commitment to the hygienists Does she understand how to manage the scheduling system and cross-train it so that other cast members can support it? As a self-directed team member, does she lead and mentor and is she responsible for the performance of her fellow cast members?

Are any of these concepts new or a surprise? Probably not, but what is surprising is to see a multi-billion dollar organization walk its talk, which inspires me to walk my talk so that I can influence you to walk your talk.

Is running a dental practice serious? Sometimes … but I believe there is a little Mickey Mouse in all of us, just aching to come out!

Here’s to Disney magic.

THE TRUTH ABOUT GROUP FUNCTION

BY CARL STEINBERG, DDS, MAGD, LLSR

Many of you will expect this article to discuss the merits of group function versus canine rise in developing an excursive occlusal scheme. Wrong. This group function is much more important to the success of your dental practice.

What are the things that you do to create team spirit? How do you motivate your team to follow your lead, your vision? How do you show them appreciation?

I have heard it said, "Just pay them well and give them bonuses." While we all should be paying our team a fair wage, money is not the prime motivator for a long-term, dedicated team member. I also have never used a bonus system. I believe it has too much focus on money and not on patient care.

Increases in salary do not come because a calendar year has passed. Have they shown improvement over the year? Do they warrant a change in salary? What have they done to catch your eye? Most of the time I find myself going to a team member and telling them there will be a change in their salary.

When they have to ask me for a raise, I know we have lots to talk about. Something is brewing.

I do not believe in a bonus system but do believe in unexpected acts of kindness. Be creative. I have placed additional dollars in their paycheck, given extra days off, shortened work days, gift cards and gifts.

Back to group function. Team building builds spirit and, more important in my eyes, camaraderie. So the rest of the article covers some of the things we have done as a group function.

(FYI, we have team meetings weekly for two hours, so there is always time set aside to do something.)

When we got our Mini Star, I saw this as an opportunity to have a group function. This video is our team meeting using the excess rings to have a ring toss. There was money to be made on an individual basis, as a team and as a timed event.

Competitive shopping sprees:

Our team was told we would have an event in the afternoon and dinner afterwards. We would work the morning. At lunch, they were all given an envelope with money and instructions. We went to a mall where they had a time limit to spend the money on themselves based upon rules that I made up. The one who spent the closest to the amount given would be our winner. Usually they won money. Sometimes I have a grab bag of money and everyone earned a 'pull' from the grab bag. Be creative.

At dinner, we chat about their strategies for their task as well as anything interesting that happened. Always some fun stories.

Christmas in July:

A stage show and dinner at a nice restaurant is an easy one. One July, I gave everyone some cash and they were instructed to buy a unisex gift. They were all given opaque trash bags to 'wrap' their purchases. When we came back to the office we had a "Yankee Swap."

In *Yankee Swap*, each participant brings a wrapped, unmarked gift and places it in a designated area. Each person draws a number to determine the order of gift selection. The second person gets to pick a wrapped gift or take one from someone else. It can be fun to see what people do.

The above is just a sample of what we have done and what we will do. Over the years, I have heard many other fun things teams do as a group function.

So the truth about group function is that it is about more than just teeth. It is about people - your people, your dental family. You have to take care of your team so they can take care of you and your patients. Have fun. Make it memorable.

Good luck on your journey.

3 THINGS EVERY DENTAL PRACTICE NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT MORNING MEETINGS

BY IMTIAZ MANJI

I have always been a big proponent of morning meetings in the practice, but I have to admit that I have developed an even greater appreciation for just how valuable they are since I have been working on material for our Spear Practice Solutions platform. In particular, we have developed a series of video lessons centered around what we call the Perfect Day.

Most dentists have up days and down days, and tend to feel that which one they're going to get when they come through the door in the morning is largely a matter of luck. Our Perfect Day scenario is designed to show that great days can be predictably created and consistently achieved - that your future is always curated in the now through your effective use of scheduling, through the actions you take with your "court sense" throughout the day, and yes, by having well-executed morning meetings.

When it's done right, a 15-minute morning huddle meeting can be a very powerful team alignment tool. An effective morning meeting helps you focus on the now and provide important context for the team about the day ahead. It's where you share timely intelligence and get aligned on the actions that drive your performance goals.

To make your morning meeting all those things, you need to know three things:

Know what to leave out

Let's start with what a morning meeting should not be. It's not about "verifying" today's schedule, and it's not about double-checking that people are going to do their jobs - that should all be understood already.

Neither is it about discussing every patient who is coming in that day. If you do that, your morning meeting will be an hour long.

Also, a morning meeting is not about the team showing up and listening to one person talk. A great morning meeting requires everyone to prepare in advance and share information with the rest of the team. This is about full participation; nobody has a backseat role here.

In other words, it's about sharing and compounding the knowledge you all have, in order to add more value to the patient visit.

Know what to focus on

So what *do* you cover in the morning meeting? That can be boiled down to two words: exceptions and opportunities.

Exceptions are things you and the team need to be aware of in advance so you can deal with them appropriately. It could be a lab case that was promised for first thing today but has not arrived (you don't want the patient showing up only to be rescheduled).

It could be a patient with special needs, or a patient who hasn't been in for hygiene in over two years but is coming in today because they're in pain. This is a patient whose behaviors need to be influenced so they come in regularly and concerns can be diagnosed before they become urgencies. Identifying exceptions is about proactively dealing with potential roadblocks.

Opportunities are the other side of this coin. An opportunity might be knowing that there is open time for the doctor in the afternoon, so the team should look for patients with unaccepted treatment needs to re-communicate and possibly schedule to begin today.

It could be talking to a patient about clinical esthetic dentistry because they expressed an interest in whitening when they last scheduled their hygiene appointment. Or maybe it's a patient who needs significant treatment but has resisted going ahead in the past. What if today is the day they decide to move forward?

A big part of seizing opportunities is preparing to be ready for when the patient is ready.

Once you learn what to look for in terms of exceptions and opportunities, it's actually quite easy to prepare and conduct a great meeting of no longer than 15 minutes where all the necessary information is shared and the team strategizes around specific items or patients where appropriate.

Know where you go from here

Because of the way it provides this clarity, a good morning meeting gives the doctor and team something really important as you move ahead with the day: peace of mind in knowing that the important areas of patient focus are accounted for. There is a time for looking ahead, and this is it. Once everyone has that focus and sense of direction, it becomes much easier to be in the moment with each patient.

And when you are fully and completely “in the now,” you are far more likely to take advantage of opportunities that present themselves; opportunities that you otherwise might miss in the busyness of a day, such as spending time with that emergency patient who, with the right attention, could become your next great case.

In that sense, the morning meeting has a vital role to play. It helps set the tone for the day by getting everyone quickly briefed, focused and ready to go.

And by giving you the security of knowing what you need to know, it also gives you the freedom to discover the things you don’t know yet. It gives you the freedom to think big.

Of course, putting together a tight 15 minutes of focus requires some preparation, but not as much as you might think. It is usually a matter of simply scanning the daysheet a day in advance with an eye for those exceptions and opportunities.

And if you are a member of a service such as Spear Practice Solutions, that process becomes even easier, as you can quickly and easily pull the data you need to give you this kind of vital direction.

Many of our clients have found this approach to daily meetings - and, indeed, the entire concept of the Perfect Day as we present it in the Practice Solutions platform - to be absolutely transformative when it comes to simplifying their lives and amplifying their success. If you want to find out more about how to program more “perfect days” into your practice, and how a service like Spear Practice Solutions can help you do that, I encourage you to visit our site and see for yourself what is possible.

... when you are fully and completely “in the now,” you are far more likely to take advantage of opportunities that present themselves

SPEAR
PRACTICE SOLUTIONS

Your Ideal Business Framework

Spear Practice Solutions provides coaching, targeted learning, real-time analytics and customized action plans

Ready to identify your ideal path for growth? Your independent practice is just that — independent. Cookie-cutter advice just won’t cut it.

With Practice Solutions, dedicated Spear experts provide you with:

- ✓ An intuitive analytics platform with customized, real-time practice data and easy-to-visualize metrics
- ✓ Ongoing coaching and feedback from Spear’s dedicated team of consultants to develop a growth mindset and refine the leadership skills that foster team cohesion
- ✓ Inspiring, interactive campus workshops — led by the dental industry’s top educators — on topics that will unify your team
- ✓ Access to Spear Online, the dental industry’s most innovative online learning platform, which includes clinical and team training resources, in addition to the Patient Education video platform

Following a business framework tailored to your individual vision, you’ll empower your staff to excel — and drive continuous, positive change for the entire practice.

Learn more at **speareducation.com/practicesolutions** and speak with an expert today about how to receive your own individual business framework to address your unique practice goals.

4 ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE WEEKLY TEAM MEETINGS

BY JIM MCKEE, DDS

Staff training is one of the hallmarks of a practice that emphasizes comprehensive treatment planning.

While training can occur in several ways, team meetings have proven to be one of the most effective tools to develop well-trained staff members. As a dentist, it can be difficult to organize and run staff meetings effectively. The format outlined in this article will provide immediate results that will increase productivity in your practice.

Team Education:

[Discover how Spear Online meeting and education resources can align your team and improve your practice]

The key to effective staff meetings is to have regularly scheduled meetings. Weekly meetings allow for a continual assessment of each staff member's needs. The meeting format we use in my practice has four different elements:

1/ Schedule review/preview

The beginning of each meeting starts with a review of the schedule from last week, which allows for an honest assessment of what worked well in the office and what needs improvement. During this section of the meeting, there is a strong emphasis on scheduling since it is the key to a successful and low-stress practice.

After reviewing last week's schedule, the next week's schedule is previewed. This preview allows for any changes that may help the schedule flow more smoothly.

2/ New patient assessments

The second part of the meeting is an assessment of new patients. Last week's new patients are reviewed, and the entire staff can hear about new patient experiences. We discuss who referred the new patient and both technical and non-technical aspects associated with each.

This allows the dentist to clearly communicate to the team the managerial and clinical aspects unique to each patient. After reviewing last week's new patients, we preview next week's new patients. This gives the staff insight into who will be entering the practice and how to create the best experience for every new patient.

3/ Consultation appointment review

The third part of the meeting is a review of the consultation appointments. The consultation appointments from last week are discussed in detail from both a managerial and a clinical perspective. This helps the staff understand the steps for determining a treatment plan for each new patient.

After reviewing last week's consultations, the following week's consultations are previewed. Each treatment plan is introduced, and the team can discuss if phasing is necessary with a clinical or a technical perspective.

4/ Question and answer

The fourth and final part of the meeting is a roundtable discussion driven by the team. Each staff member can ask a clinical or managerial question and discuss each for a maximum of five minutes.

In this format, the discussion covers key concepts in the question and allows the dentist to devote more time to the topic in future meetings if warranted. This is a fast-paced, effective learning tool that prevents staff members from getting bored during the meeting.

Meetings can last between 1-2 hours based upon the time the dentist wants to devote to staff training. The meetings have proven to be an invaluable tool to help my team understand clinical topics and articulate these issues to patients.

Make the commitment to regularly scheduled meetings and enjoy the benefits that occur when your staff has time to learn and develop through your leadership.

A SOLUTION TO INTRA-OFFICE COMMUNICATION — THAT DOESN'T INVOLVE STICKY NOTES

BY COURTNEY LAVIGNE, DMD

Having scripts, protocols and systems in place is one of the most important things we can do to improve efficiency, increase production, and decrease stress in our office. If you're anything like me, you have a running to-do list in your head of the written protocols you'd like to implement for every aspect of your practice. Finding the time to do it is the weak link to implementation.

I've always hated sticky notes. There's nothing that makes an area look more disheveled than those tiny yellow squares lining a computer monitor or adorning the front desk. It seems like a common sentiment amongst practice owners, but I think there may be a secret society of office managers and receptionists that hold yearly meetings to solidify their love of the things!

When and why do we use sticky notes? We use them when we need to remind ourselves of something. It's usually something that we don't have the time to get to right away, or don't have the tools or information necessary to complete at that moment. In my office, I get back to my desk after a busy morning of patients and I find them lining my laptop with questions or needs that have arisen from phone calls at the front when I wasn't accessible.

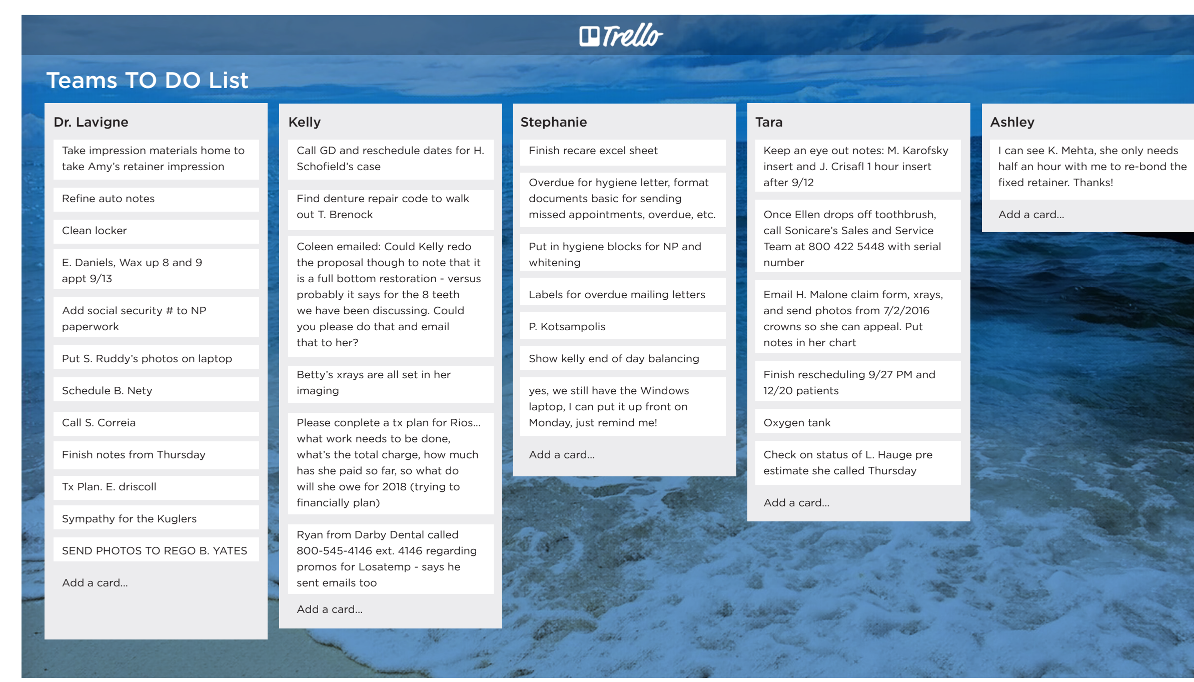
While I hate the sticky notes aesthetically, the bigger problem is that sticky notes allow for things to get lost or forgotten. I've been trying to find a better way to organize needs in my office for a while, and I've recently stumbled upon a game-changer for office communication. There are a lot of programs that do the same thing, but I've been using Trello. Some of the more popular alternative programs include Airtable, Asana, Avaza, ClickUp, Kanban Tool and Yalla. It's a website (that's free!) that we have up on each of our computers, logged in to the office account. Each employee has a column, and we can add tasks, reminders or questions as they arise. It has been a **game changer** for our office organization.

When the front office gets a phone call from the lab with a question and I can't come to the phone, a sticky note finds its way to me. I can't count how many times in a week I'm in the hygiene room and will make a promise to a patient to email them photos, send them a vacation link we were discussing, or ask my hygienist to remind me something about a case. When that happens, I either leave the room and forget to do it or ask my hygienist to remind me, and a sticky note ends up on my desk. I don't get to the sticky note before the laptop is packed up, the sticky note ends up in the creases of my laptop case and I find it a few weeks later.

Now, we have inter-office communication to immediately and quickly keep ourselves organized and on task. Below is how we organize our Trello.

I've also started personal Trello boards to organize my CE travel including rental cars, hotels and flights. If you've ever flown to Spear and gone to check into the Fairmont without a reservation like I have, or forgotten which rental car company you booked, this is golden.

You may be wondering how a sticky note problem warrants a Spear Digest article, but this has honestly been the best change we've made in our office of late, and I'd be doing a disservice not to share this with others. I was recently at the Faculty Club summit chatting with some other dentists, and it turns out sticky notes are a universal problem in dentistry! Trello keeps important things from falling through the cracks, allowing us to remain on the same page at all times. Trello certainly isn't the only website that can do this for you, but it's the one that works for me.



IS YOUR DENTAL OFFICE TEAM DISENGAGED?

BY AMY MORGAN

Recently, the consultants at Pride passed around an article by Paul Nolan, called "The High Cost of a Disengaged Workforce." It really resonated with me, as we see this cost exacted from many a dental practice we come in contact with! The article opened with a Gallup survey statistical bomb shell:

"Gallup surveys how many employees in the U.S. work force are engaged and reports its findings each year. Nearly seven in 10 (68 percent) are disengaged as of the 2016 report. Ever since Gallup began measuring employee engagement in 2000, the percentage of engaged workers in the U.S. has never topped 33 percent. Worldwide, only 13 percent of employees working for an organization are engaged. (For the record, Gallup defines engaged employees as those who are involved in and enthusiastic about their work and workplace.)"

How does this relate to dentistry? If you have ever had what I jokingly call a "Walking Dead" zombie staff meeting, then you know our profession is not immune! The article went on to quote Alyssa Retallick, who, in a post for Glassdoor.com, stated, "actively disengaged employees aren't just unhappy at work - they're busy acting out their unhappiness. Every day, these workers undermine what their engaged co-workers accomplish. They're aggressively lowering morale and productivity levels. These people can be a real danger to any organization."

In a small business, it is easy to spot a perpetually disengaged team member, as they seem to suck the energy out of any change initiative over the long term. That still doesn't make it any easier to deal with. The question becomes, if lack of engagement is such an epidemic, how do we inoculate our own teams and keep them protected? The answer lies in all the leadership principles we teach at Pride Institute, that are so easy to talk about, but so difficult to do consistently!

If lack of engagement is such an epidemic, how do we inoculate our own teams and keep them protected?

In Nolan's article, they presented **three steps that companies can take to increase happiness at work** (which should sound familiar ...):

1/ Acknowledge contributions and effort.

Go beyond the cookie-cutter recognition program and create unique recognition tailored to employees' passions.

2/ Recognize service.

Don't wait for the traditional five-year anniversary. Celebrate milestones early and often, including at one month and one year.

3/ Enhance your culture.

Work should be somewhere employees want to be, not have to be. Don't be afraid to give them opportunities to thrive.

It sounds so simple. As I often say, no dental assistant ever looked up at the sky in third grade and said, "I hope someday I can suck spit for a serious potato-head dentist and make his/her life miserable!" Point being? Bad, disengaged staff members are made by no or poor leadership, period. Life can be a slow, erosive process of mini failures and lack of fulfillment. It is our job to create a culture of meaning, where everyone on the team feels empowered and excited to participate. My profound wish is that Pride Institute helps our community defy the Gallup Surveys, by creating leadership mojo for those we touch.

Get out there and engage your team!

A LESSON IN HOW TO ENCOURAGE TEAM MEMBERS TO GROW

BY IMTIAZ MANJI

Does praise really encourage people? As it turns out, it depends on what you are praising. This is something that was illustrated in an experiment done years ago on groups of early-teen students.

Two groups of kids were given the same set of IQ-problem tests and most of them did quite well. The students in the first group were praised for their ability and were told things like, "That's a really good score. You must be very smart." The ones in the other group were praised for their effort, with encouragement like, "That's a really good score. You must have worked very hard." In other words, the first group was made to feel they had a special gift, while the second group was made to feel that the result was because of the work they put into the problems.

What's interesting is what happened next. When given the choice of whether or not to tackle a challenging new task they could learn from, most of the students in the first group declined. Meanwhile, 90 percent of kids in the second group – the ones who had been praised for their effort – decided to give it a try. As the researchers discovered, the students in the first group, after being told they were smart, were reluctant to take on anything new that might expose any flaws or call into question that assessment of their abilities.

This story comes from a terrific book by the Stanford researcher Carol Dweck called "Mindset: The New Psychology of Success," and she uses it to illustrate the difference between what she calls the fixed mindset and the growth mindset. People with a fixed mindset tend to think of most capabilities as something you either have or you don't – that there are things you are good at it and things you are not, and that you have built-in limits. Those with a growth mindset take a more flexible view and are more willing to expose themselves to failure in the quest to continually grow.

What this means is that even people who are naturally exceptionally smart can end up limiting themselves because they have developed a mindset that is dependent on their need to be right and to not look bad in front of others, so they stay within the safe boundaries they have set for themselves. Those with a growth mindset, on the other hand, don't see things that way. They recognize that limits are almost always self-imposed, and they are excited by the idea of exceeding expectations, developing new skills (even if it means enduring some failure along the way), and discovering new standards of excellence.

This is a common phenomenon in dental practice teams as well. The fixed mindset can be hard to get past, and it often originates from perfectly understandable human impulses. After all, people like the idea of being good at what they do. Paradoxically, that's what keeps many people from getter better at what they do – they don't want to challenge those assumptions about themselves or expose themselves to situations outside their comfort zone. But when team members are part of an environment where being able to step out of the comfort zone is recognized as a measure of success, great things can happen. This is exactly what I mean when I talk about the importance of creating a culture of growth in the dental practice. It's all about creating an environment where people feel safe about exploring new levels competency. And as this story of the students makes clear, it is the leader's role to encourage and praise their people, not just for being good at what they do, but for participating fully in the process of becoming even better.

8 STEPS TO LEAD YOUR TEAM TO EXCELLENCE

BY AMY MORGAN

The first quarter of the year is a perfect time to assess your practice culture and identify opportunities for growth and improvement.

A great leader cultivates an environment that inspires teams to achieve new levels of commitment and success. If you want to motivate your team to follow your lead, “Look in the mirror,” as Ken Blanchard said.

There are eight simple steps to lead your team to excellence. Simple to understand, but they take a lifetime of effort to master – so fasten your seat belts, let’s do this!

1/ Find your ‘why’

One of my favorite quotes begins with, “A task without a vision is drudgery.”

People are inspired by the vision, outcomes and the North Star goals that you set. In other words, their “whys.” If the leader is not inspired by the vision, the team won’t be inspired either. The word “inspire” is derived from the Latin word “inspirare,” which means “to breathe life into.”

If you have “Walking Dead” team meetings, your meetings are too focused on the drudgeries and not your aspirations.

2/ Create your culture

The definition of culture is the shared expectations, attitudes and belief systems that serve as the guiding foundation for an organization’s success.

Your culture is the practice’s X factor. It’s what brings ideal team members to your doorstep and keeps them long-term. Your culture should not only match your vision and values, it should promote them.

The mark of an excellent culture is the amount of “we, us and our” that is heard, rather than, “I, me and you.”

3/ Communicate in a way that influences and inspires

Unfortunately, many clinicians sound more like a “Peanuts” teacher – “wah, wah wah” – when they communicate to their team. A common misconception about communication is that it is always effective. Have you ever talked about something during a team meeting and then had your team act and ask questions as if you had never communicated with them in the first place?

To improve communication with your team, you must be honest, authentic and specific with a healthy dose of active listening.

4/ Focus on one goal at a time

When everything is important, nothing is important. A great leader can prioritize and chooses their battles wisely.

What’s one thing we can focus on as a team that reduces stress, increases efficiency or morale? Once you have chosen a focused path, stay focused.

5/ Use your resources wisely

Many leaders feel they must do everything on their own. Delegation and trust are essential for a team to flourish. What gets in the way of effective delegation is a desire for perfection, which prevents the “subgingival” dentist from recognizing excellence.

Get comfortable with being good enough as you strive for great, otherwise the burden will always remain solely on you.

6/ Inspect what you expect

The biggest mistake a leader can make is to assign new goals, tasks or skills and wait months later to notice that there is no change.

As part of inspecting, a leader must acknowledge their team when they see things being done right, almost right or not completely wrong. Tasks and skills that get rewarded get repeated, so encourage the rightness and life will get easier.

Being a role model means always helping your team.

7/ Jump into new challenges with your team

If you ask your team to change, you do not get to stay comfortable. Being a role model means always helping your team.

There is an old antiperspirant commercial with the tagline, “Never let them see you sweat!” This thought process is the exact opposite of successful leadership. There is nothing more empowering than a team seeing their leader go through the struggle of a major change and making it out the other side. There is value in being real and vulnerable.

8/ Celebrate the small, medium and large wins along the way

Celebrating the small wins helps to reinforce positive actions. Unleash childlike joy for your team’s success and let them win.

In every sport there is a myriad of opportunities to check the score and high-five. If you wait for a major success before celebrating, you will be waiting
a long time.
The secret to leading your team to excellence lies in this list. If you make a commitment to openly and honestly working on these steps, you will create inspired team members who want to do what you want them to do.

Now get out there and inspire!

WHY EVERYONE ON YOUR DENTAL TEAM NEEDS SPECIAL TRAINING

BY IMTIAZ MANJI

I have written previously about the "compartmental" mindset that can take hold in a dental team, where everyone is comfortable doing their own thing in their own little world, as opposed to interacting and working together toward a common, greater purpose.

In order to understand how to overcome this mindset, it is important to see how it can begin in the first place. To do that, it is probably worthwhile to look at your hiring and training practices.

When you have a position available, you often start by looking for someone who is "experienced" in that role, or has recently completed an assisting or administration program. The idea is that you save time in training by getting someone who is ready to step in with the right level of competence.

You save time in training by getting someone who is ready to step in with the right level of competence.

That all makes sense, as far as it goes. But I don't think it goes far enough.

New Hires and Your Dental Team

When you are confident that a new hire for your dental team is experienced or trained in the position, it is often easy to take that experience as reassurance. You just bring the person in and leave it to them to figure out the details of how their idea of the job fits it in with the philosophy of *your* practice. So if you're hiring someone who has been working in another practice, they are coming with a perception of practice goals and value, and a job description, that's been determined by another dentist.

Even if you're hiring someone for your dental team straight from school, they still come with a mindset - in this case, one that is based on the technical foundations they are taught, likely with a fairly limited focus on the patient-value-oriented reality of today's contemporary practices. That's a decent foundation, but it is up to you to show them that there is so much more.

Naturally, that includes providing them with the right continuing education opportunities so they can come to appreciate what it means to create value at a high level. Beyond that, there are things you can do to get them to understand, in an up-close way, how that translates into daily actions in your practice. For instance, you can give the new recruit a run-through of the new patient experience, with the new dental team member as the patient, so they can see firsthand how your practice creates patient value. Have them talk about what they learned from the experience, and how they see themselves, and what they do, contributing to the value your dental team creates.

There is no getting around it. If you want a dynamic dental team that is aligned and supportive, one that is built on your idea of what an ideal dental team should be, you have to establish a set of expectations that goes beyond what they learn in school or what they bring from other practices. In that sense, everyone on your dental team should be specially trained - trained in what it takes to be a member of **your** practice.

SOCIAL MEDIA FOR THE DENTAL PRACTICE

START WITH THE END IN MIND

BY SARAH COTTINGHAM

Have you ever looked up a local business' reviews prior to using their services? Did the information that you read influence your decision in any way? Patients do that same thing when searching for a new dentist, which is why it's important that your online reputation is impressive, memorable and inviting.

Social media has become a primary vehicle for marketing any business. Dental practices now use social media to attract new patients and retain them. While attracting and retaining patients, we must maintain relevance for our services and engage the desired audience we want to attract.

Posting quirky photos of office shenanigans might seem fun and lively; although this is accurate, it may not appeal to the type of patient you desire in your practice. Establish a balance between providing levity, dental facts, and engaging, informative content with the information posted. Your online presence must cover all demographics and be geared to your ideal patient. Many dentists have been slow to incorporate social media into their practices because of time and a perceived lack of ROI.

As a business owner, we must look at social media from a bottom-up approach. What is the outcome you desire and what are the foundational pieces to help you achieve it? What do we need to do in order to get great reviews and ultimately build and protect our internet reputation? What you must realize is that using social media reaches more people than you realize.

Here are a few staggering statistics:

- Facebook has 1.13 billion daily active users. (Statista, 2016)
- 72 percent of adult internet users use Facebook. (Pew Research Center, 2015)
- 31 percent of adult internet users use Pinterest. (Pew Research Center, 2015)
- Pinners are just as likely to purchase as users from other social channels, but spend 50 percent more on aver age compared to other social channels. They also spend 20 percent more than users referred from non-social channels, including search. (Pinterest, 2016)
- Pinterest has 100 million monthly active users. (The New York Times, 2015)
- 91 percent of consumers regularly or occasionally read online reviews
- 90 percent of consumers read 10 reviews or less before they feel that they can trust a business

This makes managing your online reputation imperative because reviews can send a prospective patient away before they ever even consider making the first phone call.

The best strategy to a great online reputation is to create a great experience from the first interaction and begin asking patients for testimonials. The testimonials can be posted across several social media platform simultaneously. Here are 10 tips for building an impressive online reputation:

1/ **Create a social media presence for your business** (Facebook®, Twitter®, Instagram®, Pinterest®, LinkedIn®, Google Plus®, Blogger®)

2/ **Ensure that your website is up-to-date**, listing all social media links

3/ **Use a tool that can help manage multiple social media networks** with minimal efforts and cost (Hootesuite®, SocialOomph®, Sprout Social®, Everypost®)

4/ **Post regularly** to the social media platforms during times that your ideal patient will be viewing (schedule the posts accordingly)

5/ **Educate on social media platforms** about topics that will interest your ideal patient (beverage choices, impact of long term exposure to acids, sleep apnea, etc.)

6/ **Monitor feedback and reviews** regularly; like and reply in a timely manner

7/ **Handle negative feedback immediately in a positive way**. As a business owner, you want to avoid getting negative online reviews completely if possible! Let's be realistic, there will be a time when you get a negative review - it's bound to happen.

Patients will periodically use the power of social media as a means of "communicating" about their appointment when they are not happy. Responding immediately in a positive manner is the best reaction.

Things to remember:

- Respond with acknowledging the reviewers' experience, "thank you for providing your feedback. We work very hard to ensure that every patient is served with the best care possible. Your experience and feedback is very important to us, and we will be contacting you immediately to personally discuss your experience."
- Do not engage in conversation through social media about an experience
- Do not attempt to provide details to defend the practice.
- Responding with a simple, "We look forward to having the opportunity to discuss your experience" shows that you are open to resolving the issue and you are professionally managing the conversation.
- If you are unable to contact the patient, you can post that information as well: "we have attempted to contact the reviewer; unfortunately, our attempts have not been successful."
- If you reach the patient and resolve the situation, ask the patient to post an update to the review.

An impressive online reputation begins with building the presence, finding a simple way for a member(s) of your team to update/monitor with minimal effort and interacting with your audience in a positive way. For more information, reach out to your Spear Practice Solutions Consultant.

References

Local Consumer Review Survey 2016 | The Impact Of Online Reviews. BrightLocal. https://www.brightlocal.com/learn/local-consumer-review-survey/. Accessed September 29, 2017.

An impressive online reputation begins with building the presence

INCREASE YOUR PRACTICE'S SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE — BY HIGHLIGHTING YOUR EVERYDAY DENTISTRY

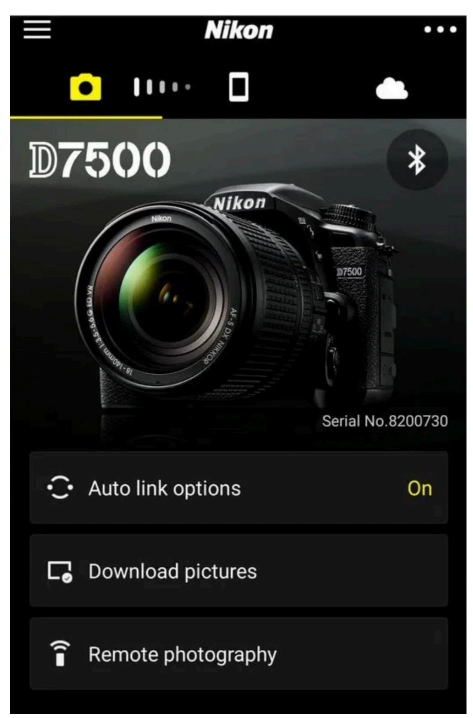
BY IMAHN MOIN DDS

Ever since attending the Art of Treatment Planning seminar in Seattle this past August, I've made it my resolution to use my new camera more often. While taking a modified full series with frontal retracted, occlusal and buccal images is a great way to start discussing comprehensive dentistry with your new patients, you can start small as well.

Posting photos to an office Instagram account or Facebook page is also a really good way to engage with your patients and the community and show the kind of work you do on a daily basis. I'm finding that it's more important to be regular and consistent than to make one post a year with a large case that you recently completed.

With all the dental social media accounts that have thousands of followers, fancy equipment and software, sometimes its easy to get into a mindset that the things we do on a daily basis won't be "cool" or impressive to our patients. But I'm finding that those routine things we do can be a great conversation starter, while also boosting your office's online presence.

One feature I love on my Nikon D7500 is that it can sync via Bluetooth straight to my phone or iPad through the SnapBridge app. This means that I can take a simple photo before and after the procedure, and within minutes make a spiffy post to our office's social media accounts via the Instagram or Facebook apps, or discuss with a patient on an iPad in the operatory. No need to take the card out, go find the card reader, download the pictures to the computer and then try to edit the photos in a special program before posting, or trying to get it to a computer in the consult room where you can discuss with the patient and have to move them there.



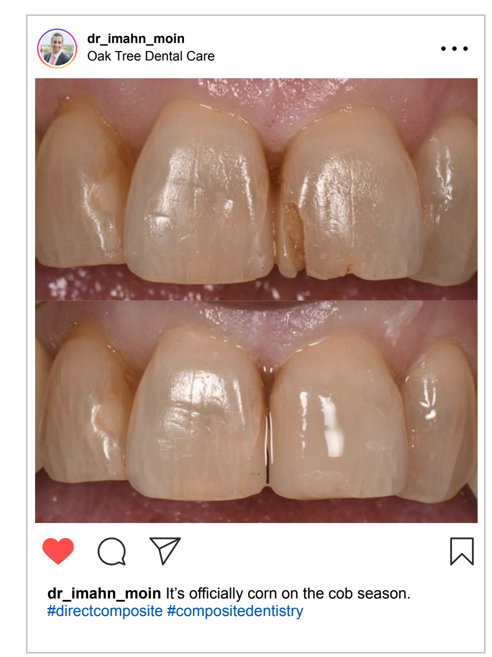
Now, this won't take the place of a proper consult or a "tour of the mouth" for comprehensive exams, but this can definitely streamline the process and make regular posting more convenient. If you plan on posting photos publically, make sure you have a photographic consent form signed by the patient, either on the day of the procedure or one on file from a new patient intake packet. Even though most of the photos I post don't show or reveal any patient identifying features, it's good to cover your bases.

If you have a Nikon D7500 or other camera with the SnapBridge technology, all you need to do is download the SnapBridge App to your phone or tablet. You can pair the camera and device together and then be able to see, select and download only the photos you want from your camera on your portable device. If you want to just show the patient while they are in the chair, you can stop right there.

If you want to create a post on one of your accounts, the photos will be right there in your library and can be uploaded like any other photo post. If you are planning on sharing a before-and-after photo, I'd recommend downloading the Layout app as well.

The app integrates with Instagram and allows you to show the two images in a single picture. Within the Instagram app, there will be a Layout button, and it will take you through the process of orienting your photos relative to one another, and allowing you to do some minor rotations, cropping and zooming.

Once your collage is done, you can post it straight to your office Instagram account (with witty caption and hashtags, of course). The collage will also be saved in your device's photo library so you can post it to your Facebook account, just like uploading a single photo. I hope this encourages you to use a camera more and get connected with your community by showing the great work we do on a daily basis.



HOW TO TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR ONLINE PRACTICE REVIEWS

SOCIAL MEDIA

BY BENJAMIN ROJEK

Hate it or love it, social media is here to stay. Now it's not a matter of if your dental practice should have a social media presence, but why aren't you already on there?

I've heard some dentists say they avoid social media because they don't want to have deal with negative comments and/or reviews. Here's the thing:

Just because you don't make a social media page doesn't mean people aren't going to leave reviews elsewhere.

By creating a social media account for your dental practice, you will have more control of your online reputation. You've created a space in which you can interact with your current patients and future patients (it is social media, after all), allowing you to find out what you do well and where you can improve.

But how do you get them to come to your social media page in the first place?

By creating a social media account for your dental practice, you will have more control of your online reputation.

4 ways to build your dental practice social media audience

1/ **Social media advertising:** Create an ad on the platforms that you use to let people know about your practice's social media page. Social media advertising platforms have become easier to use in recent years, and you won't have to spend much to get a small boost in your audience numbers.

2/ **Email signature blocks**: In all outgoing emails from your practice, the signature blocks should include links to all your social media accounts.

3/ **Links from your website:** Use the icons from each platform in the header of your practice's website with a call to "Follow Us on Social Media."

4/ **Signs in the practice:** Put up a sign at the front desk letting people know which platforms you are on and how they can find you.

Getting dental practice reviews on social media

Now that you've built up your audience on your social media accounts, it's time to get some reviews on there.

First, you can create a post on your account letting your followers know that they can leave a review. It's important to note that social media platforms, just like review websites such as Yelp, discourage businesses from asking for reviews. It might seem a small thing, but letting people know they can leave a review is less likely to earn a penalty (e.g. loss of organic reviews or, worse, the shutting down of your account) than *asking* people to leave a review.

Another method of getting reviews is signage in your practice. When patients arrive at your practice, they are usually required to come to the front counter to check in. Why not use that moment to ask them to check into your practice on social media? Instead of relying on your front desk person to remember to ask each patient, spend a few dollars to buy a clear plastic sign holder and print a sheet of paper with your practice logo on it and this message:

Thank you for checking into [Your Practice]! You can also check in on your favorite social media app and let your friends know who your favorite dentist is!

Now, is everyone going to heed this advice? No, of course not. But even if two people in 100 do so because of that sign, that's 2 percent more than were previously checking in on social media.

And why do want them to check in on social media? Many social media platforms and apps, such as Facebook, also allow users to review the places they've visited. By having your patients check in at your practice, they've let the social media platform know that they were there, which in turn sets off an algorithm that asks them to leave a review (saving you from having to do so). Even if the platform or app doesn't publish reviews, a check-in adjusts its algorithm so that it will show the person more of your social media posts and ads in the future.

All of that for just an $8.00 investment.

No matter which social media platform you choose to join or how you get people to leave reviews, the goal of social media is to be social, so don't forget to interact and thank your followers/reviewers for taking the time to reach out. A little kindness goes a long way. (And I'll talk more about handling negative reviews in a future article.)

HOW TO TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR ONLINE PRACTICE REVIEWS

YELP + GOOGLE

BY BENJAMIN ROJEK

One of the most frustrating by products of the digital age for dental practices - most businesses, really - is the proliferation of review websites and apps. Yelp, Google Maps, Facebook, Foursquare, Epinions, Expresit and Angie's List are but a few of these sites and apps, and more pop up all the time.

Unfortunately, many practice owners operate under the mindset of "do nothing until we get a negative review." At that point, however, it could be too late. If you have zero reviews and then one negative review, that's all potential patients will be able to see of your practice online.

Dental practice review management doesn't have to be difficult. You can set up a buffer against negative reviews utilizing the below tactics. Each of these can be done either by the practice owner or a staff member, and most just require small additional steps to processes that you should already have in place.

Managing dental practice reviews online

While there are plenty of review websites and apps online, the two most popular remain Google's local search and Yelp. Therefore, the remainder of this article will focus on tactics to draw more reviewers to those sites.

So, where do you start? First, you or one of your team members should check both Google and Yelp for reviews of your practice, if you haven't already done so. What you're looking for is the overall scores on each one. If the overall scores are positive (4 out of 5 or 5 out of 5), then your next step is to "claim" and work on your business pages on both platforms. Claiming the business pages and adding images, hours of operation, etc., will help your business show up higher in search results.

However, if you have a low overall score, you don't want to claim or add to your business pages just yet. As was just pointed out, doing so will place your practice higher in the search results - accompanied by your less-than-stellar review score. Instead, skip to the step that follows.

Now you'll want to encourage people to leave a review. Again, it's better to avoid relying on your front desk person to ask your patients to leave a review. Instead, you can use of these two methods:

1/ You or your dental assistant can make a note in the patient's file about their overall mood when leaving the practice that day. To make it easier for your team, just use "positive" or "negative." Based on that note, your scheduling person can follow up with an email based on that overall mood. If the patient left "positive," then your follow-up email should ask them to leave a review of their experience. In the email, link to one of the two review sites (Google or Yelp). If the patient left "negative," then your follow-up email should ask them how you can improve. Clicking on that link will open another email addressed to the practice.

2/ You can send just one follow-up email to all patients. At the end of your follow-up email, you would have two choices: "Enjoy your experience at [PRACTICE NAME]? Click here." or "Feel that we could improve? Click here." In the former option, "Click here" would link to a review website; in the latter option, "Click here" would open a new email addressed to the practice.
Both methods allow you to vet the patients based on their experience at the practice. Positive experiences get to leave a review while negative experiences get to contact you about their grievances directly. While this won't stop all negative reviews, it will help build up positive reviews and allow you to more privately rectify whatever is causing a negative reaction to your practice.

Whether or not you see the negative reviews via email or online, it is important to keep your cool when it comes to responding - and you must respond. But I'll get into more detail on handling negative reviews in a future article.

HOW TO HANDLE NEGATIVE ONLINE REVIEWS FOR YOUR DENTAL PRACTICE

BY BENJAMIN ROJEK

Negative reviews are an inevitability. It's not a matter of if, but when your dental practice will receive them.

So what's to be done? Just ignore any negative reviews? Defend your practice? Start trolling the trolls?

Before you jump onto Yelp or Google My Business, keep reading for time-tested methods for successfully dealing with negative online reviews.

The anatomy of a negative dental practice review

Before deciding how to handle a review, it is most important to remember to look at the review objectively. Let's take a look at an example:

> *Be very, very careful with this place! It was the worst experience of my life and I would highly tell everyone to stay away! The doctor was nice and helpful, but the hygienists are very pushy, and they will make you feel that you have the worst mouth ever. They will try to scare you that you need deep cleaning, gum graft and all sorts of stuff. Will be looking for a new dentist.*

What do we see in the example? The first two sentences, obviously, are emotionally charged - notice the exclamation marks and words like "very," "highly" and "worst." There is nothing yet about what exactly the patient experienced at the practice. At this point, you should just register the overall mood - negative - and move on to find out why the patient feels this way. **Do not** start forming your response in your head just yet. If you're doing so, that's a red flag that your response will not fix anything and will most likely make things worse.

The third and fourth sentences now get to the core of the matter: the reviewer felt like they were being pushed into approving procedures. Again, keep your emotions out of this. Instead, ask yourself why the patient would feel this way. Was there a miscommunication? Is your staff thoroughly explaining what was found during the exam that led to the treatment suggestions?

The last sentence is a basic "won't be coming here again" message common to negative reviews. What you shouldn't do is read that and assume that because they're not coming back, you don't have to respond to the review. Instead, look at that line as a challenge to convince the reviewer as to why they should come back to your dental practice. Now that we've walked through the make-up of an online review, it's time to discuss your response.

Responding to a negative online review

First off, you must respond in a timely manner. In a survey on online reviews conducted by Dimensional Research and Zendesk, 65 percent of respondents said that customer service interactions were bad if their complaints took too long to resolve. Therefore, it's a good idea to claim your business page on Yelp and Google; it will allow you to get notifications when people leave reviews on your practice. You should also set up a Google Alert for your practice's name and your own name. This will allow you to find out if patients are talking about you or practice on blogs or forums or other websites.

Also, as has been reiterated, the last thing you want to do is bring emotion into your response, even if the review is emotionally charged. In the online review survey, 67 percent of respondents said that unpleasant people made for a bad customer service experience. It doesn't matter if the reviewer got things wrong - if you get emotional in your response to that point that it seems like an attack, you will find out how quickly the internet can turn against you.

Keep your response professional and ensure it addresses the reviewer's complaints without getting defensive.

In fact, take a lesson from the Walt Disney Company. They use the acronym **heard for dealing with customers**:

- **Hear:** Let the customer tell their entire story without interruption. Sometimes, we just want someone to listen.
- **Empathize**: Convey that you deeply understand how the customer feels. Use phrases like "I'd be frustrated, too."
- **Apologize:** As long as it's sincere, you can't apologize enough. Even if you didn't do whatever made them upset, you can still genuinely be apologetic for the way your customer feels (e.g., I'm always sorry that a customer feels upset).
- **Resolve:** Resolve the issue quickly, or make sure that your employees are empowered to do so. Don't be afraid to ask the customer: "What can I do to make this right?"
- **Diagnose:** Get to the bottom of why the mistake occurred, without blaming anyone; focus on fixing the process so that it doesn't happen again.

An online review doesn't look like a place to start a conversation, but you can make it one while applying the above technique. Read their full review, show the reviewer empathy, apologize and then ask questions if necessary. The reviewer may not respond but, by showing how you reach out to try and resolve issues, you will impress the people who check online reviews before selecting a practice.

Look at negative online reviews an opportunity to solve problems and to build good will. Keep reading to see why you don't want to try and get them removed.

Why you should let negative reviews stay

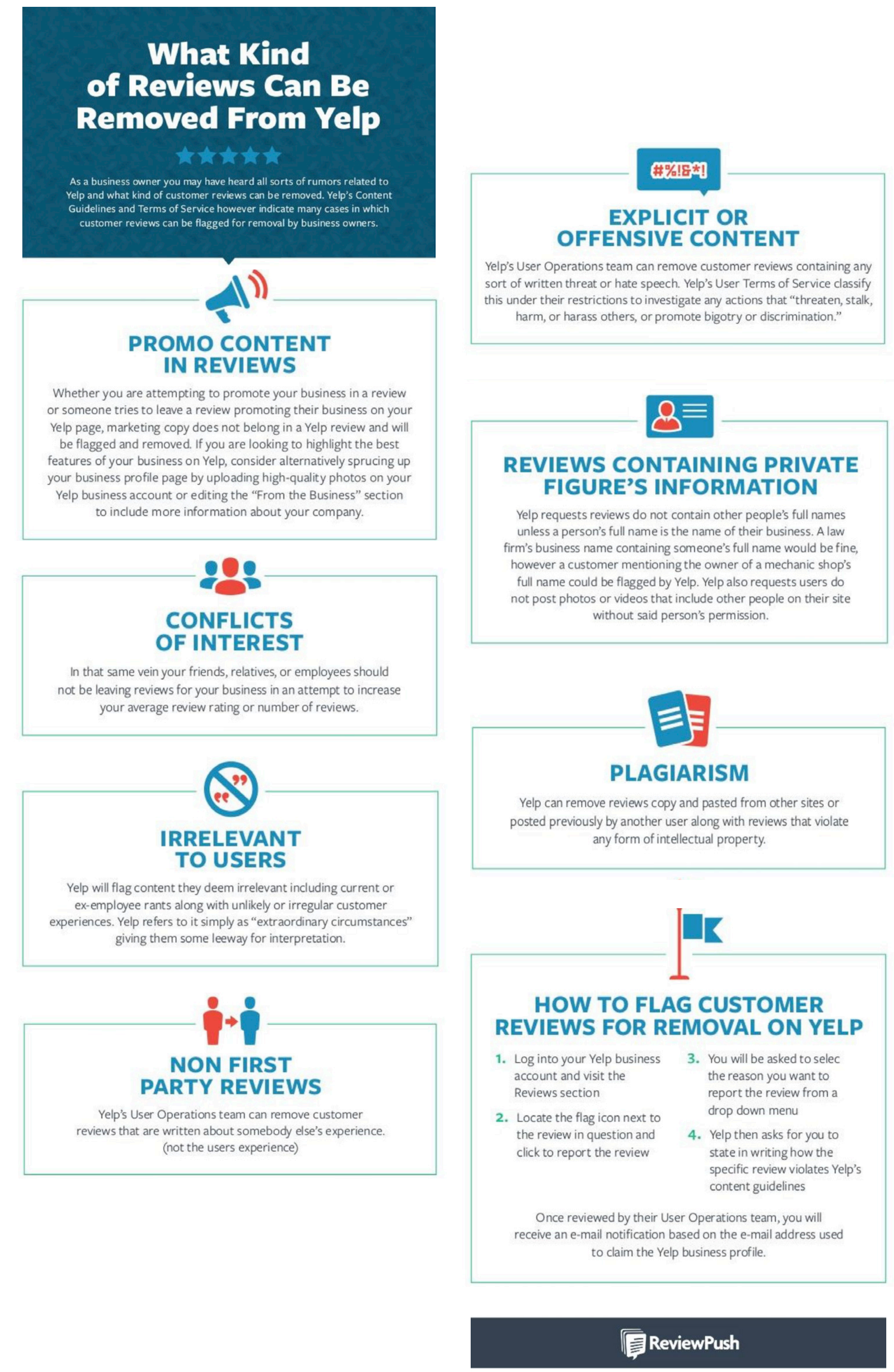
Sometimes an online review can be so outrageous and false that you want to try and have it removed from the review site. On your practice's social media page, you have even more control and it can be tempting to delete negative remarks regarding your practice.

Don't do it. To start with, there are real-world in cases in which businesses (and dental practices) have worked to have online reviews removed from Yelp or other sites only to suffer a negative public relations backlash. The silenced reviewers got their stories told in newspapers, magazines and more, which causes a much worse impact on the practice than a couple of two-star reviews on their own ever could.

Secondly, getting rid of negative reviews or comments may lead to more negative reviews or comments. With review sites, having negative reviews removed has led to embittered reviewers starting campaigns to flood review sites with negative comments and scores. On social media, you can remove and block a commenter who left a negative review, but this too has led to people getting others to go to the page and leave more negative comments. Lastly, if you use the **heard** technique and the other advice above, leaving the negative review in place can actually benefit your practice. People will see how your practice worked to solve the issue in a timely manner, and that goes a long way to building trust. Even better, it can lead to word-of-mouth publicity. In the online review survey from Dimensional Research, 35 percent of the respondents shared stories of good customer service interactions with others three to five times, while only 28 percent of respondents shared bad customer service interactions with others that many times.

If you are still determined to have a review removed, ReviewPush put together this excellent infographic on what can actually be removed from Yelp.

As I wrote at the beginning, it is inevitable that your practice will receive an online negative review at some point. Your reaction to that review is what will determine its overall effect on your practice.



SPEAR®

THE PURSUIT OF GREAT DENTISTRY

Based in Scottsdale, Arizona, Spear Education is an innovative dental education company that includes the following practice-building, member-based services:

Spear Online
The "Gateway to Great Dentistry" includes more than 1,500 video lessons spanning restorative, esthetics, occlusion, worn dentition, treatment planning and more. But access is not only for dentist continuing education. Membership provides the entire office team with staff training, team meeting and patient communication tools — like the Patient Education platform and native apps, in addition to "Conversation Essentials" video vignettes — to align the entire practice on patient care.

Spear Study Club
Involves small groups of peers that meet locally as many as eight times a year to collaborate on real-world cases, improve their clinical expertise and discuss growing practice profitability. Spear has the largest network of study clubs, with active clubs in more than 40 states and six countries.

Spear Masters Program Specialist Workshops
With 2½-day workshops for both endodontists and surgical specialists tailored to meet the needs of doctors and their teams, you will learn how to strengthen relationships with your referring practices, develop your team for growth and build the leadership skills necessary to streamline case flow.

Spear Practice Solutions
The technology-enabled business and clinical solutions platform blends custom education, personalized coaching and real-time analytics to help your practice reach its full potential.

Spear Campus
Thousands of dentists visit Spear's scenic Scottsdale campus annually for seminars and workshops. Members attend sessions in a state-of-the-art, 300-person lecture hall and receive hands-on training in Spear labs.

Spear Faculty Club
Designed as a prestigious community of doctors who share the journey to Great Dentistry with others. While all Faculty Club members demonstrate a commitment to continued learning, professional growth and providing the best patient care, many also serve as Visiting Faculty and mentor attendees during campus seminars and workshops.