

Schatz & Company, Inc.

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Coaching Your Team WILL Get You Results

For the majority of dentists, the biggest challenge is not prepping a crown; the biggest challenge is managing staff. And if you think about a stressful time when you were having trouble with a team member, you may recognize that the real problem developed over a period of many months or years.

How do you prevent a small problem from becoming bigger? How can you minimize the headaches associated with managing staff? Consider how the coaching perspective can help you develop your team.

Coaching implies that you're working in concert with your assistant, hygienist, front office, etc. to reach a higher level of performance. Coaching also means you offer positive guidance and regular follow-up.

For example, one of our dentists has a hygienist who is not removing all of the calculus during a cleaning. The doctor delayed talking with her for the following reasons: "She is well liked by the patients, and she works hard. I don't want to make her think she's doing a bad job," he said.

The doctor's concern is understandable; however his hygienist needs some coaching before bigger problems occur—patients complain about receiving a less-than-thorough cleaning, the doctor bottles up his frustrations until one day he says something inappropriate, the staff notices and talks behind the hygienist's back, etc.

Armed with the following acronym, **WILL**, the dentist has a useful tool to help resolve the problem and expand the hygienist's skill set.

W: What is working well? Start the discussion on a positive note by reviewing some things that are working well, and this may include improvements that were made since your last meeting with the team member.

I: What needs improvement? Be very specific about the area of improvement and remove all judgmental vocabulary when discussing it. And when appropriate, offer coaching to help your team member improve.

LL: What does the improvement look like? This step is normally forgotten, but it is the most important area to review. Make sure that you and the team member clearly state what the improvement looks like; otherwise you'll leave the meeting with different ideas and your frustration with each other may escalate.

Our doctor met with his hygienist and talked about three things she was doing well in the practice. Then he moved to the area of improvement and told her that he was seeing calculus on upper molars. He didn't dwell on the shortcoming; instead he immediately showed her a technique that would help resolve the problem.

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She and the doctor also discussed how to communicate when he noticed missed calculus. The doctor agreed to simply tell the patient that he wanted his hygienist to spend a moment removing something that he noticed during the exam.

In a matter of weeks, the problem was resolved. Now the doctor meets with each team member once a month for twenty – thirty minutes to offer coaching. This isn't his favorite thing to do; however he loves the results. He is minimizing problems before they become bigger, his team feels more appreciated, and he can measure the performance improvements.

A modified version of WILL can be used when a problem requires immediate attention.

One of our dentists started the day with two assistants arguing with each other. Talk about starting the day with a headache!

The doctor immediately took both assistants into her office to uncover the problem, allowing only one assistant to speak at a time—she skipped the “W” part of the acronym and went straight to “I.” Assistant A felt that Assistant B wasn't doing her share of sterilizing the instruments while Assistant B said that Assistant A seemed territorial and only wanted help at certain times.

Once the doctor had a good understanding of the problem, she helped the assistants unravel the misunderstanding and decide on what their improvements would look like. The “LL” piece is especially important when you're coaching more than one person in order to eliminate bigger misunderstandings. Then the doctor finished the meeting with the “W,” having the assistants discuss some things that were working well.

The doctor utilized WILL to handle the conflict while it was still manageable and that completely changed the emotional tone of her practice. That is the power of coaching.

Consider using WILL for team development and for conflict resolution. Once a month meet with your team either individually or in groups (assistants, hygienists, front office). These meetings do not need to take more than thirty minutes, and once your team is trained to think in terms of a solution-focused approach—what will the improvements look like—you will get more accomplished in a short period of time than you ever did in a long staff meeting.

Team development and conflict resolution are about more than just putting out fires. By committing a small amount of time each month, you will improve performance and morale while reducing headaches in the process.