

# THE 9 AREAS OF EXPERTISE: TEAM BUILDING

By Roger P. Levin, DDS



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In consulting relationships with more than 24,000 dental practices since its founding in 1985, Levin Group has developed high levels of knowledge and skill in all areas of practice management and marketing, which we refer to as *The 9 Areas of Expertise*:

1. **Production**
2. **Collections**
3. **Team Building**
4. **Scripting**
5. **Case Acceptance**
6. **New Patient Experience**
7. **Hygiene**
8. **Scheduling**
9. **Marketing**



In this whitepaper, we will look at how dentists can empower their team members and encourage teamwork to facilitate a successful working environment.

Dentists—the main source of production for the practice—must devote as much time as possible to direct patient care. When they don't spend 98% of their day chairside, the practice loses revenue. That's why it's crucial to have a dependable, capable team running the office and handling all non-clinical tasks.

The concept of finding the perfect team is a myth—there's probably nothing wrong with the people you already have. Instead of seeking new team members, focus instead on providing your current team members with the following tools for better performance:

## 1. An Inspiring Vision

Great leaders can motivate others to follow them when they paint a picture of where they're going. The question dentists need to answer is, *where do I want the practice to be in three years?* Will it become a million-dollar business? Will the marketing coordinator double the number of referrals from current patients? Will the dentist decrease his or her hours? Doctors need to create the vision, write it down and share it with their team. The vision should be part of the discussion during meetings, and every team member should have a copy of it. By sharing the “big picture,” the dentist gives team members a common objective to work toward together.

## 2. Goals to Pursue

Once the vision is established, goals will guide the doctor and team in the right direction. Otherwise, everyday tasks can easily sidetrack everyone. To make the goals more influential and effective, the dentist should write down at least 10, with deadlines. Next, the doctor should assign primary responsibility for each goal to an

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individual or position. That way, each team member knows his or her specific role in moving the practice toward the vision. When each person clearly understands what is expected and is held accountable *to the entire team* for meeting that expectation, motivation increases and performance improves.

## 3. Detailed Job Descriptions

Each position in the practice needs a documented job description, including which of the practice goals fall within that staff member's responsibility. For example, if the practice sets a target of reactivating 85% or more of inactive patients in the next six months, this target would be included in the front desk coordinator's written duties. Specific job descriptions spread the accountability for achieving success among all team members, and provide an objective way to measure performance.

## 4. Annual Performance Reviews

At least once a year, practice owners should conduct performance reviews to provide team members with feedback on their contributions to the practice. No one particularly looks forward to them, but reviews do provide a valuable opportunity for dentists to praise hard workers and address any shortcomings that might hinder progress toward the practice vision. Reviews also represent an excellent opportunity for the doctor to *listen* to employees. In these performance reviews, doctors should encourage team members to do 80% of the talking in an open, non-defensive manner. These meetings are meant to be positive, growth-oriented and informational.

## 5. Effective Management Systems

The dentist must provide team members with management systems that enable them to do their jobs efficiently. Otherwise, goals will quickly be forgotten as staff members scramble to get patients seen on time and accounts paid. In contrast, with well-designed systems in place, the everyday processes of scheduling and moving patients through the office will flow smoothly.

Management systems work best when they are simple and repeatable. Simple means that the steps can be readily understood by any team member who needs to utilize the system. Repeatable means that every step is documented so that processes are always done the same way. These two characteristics also make it easier for a practice to weather staff changes and absences, which are unavoidable.

## 6. Realistic Scripts for Patient Interactions

Every interaction between a team member and a patient provides a chance to establish trust, build value and provide the best customer service possible. The key to capitalizing on these opportunities is scripting. The right words can influence patients to show up on time for appointments, pay what they owe, say "yes" to treatment plans, make referrals and follow the dentist's recommendations. Excellent scripts provide staff members with influential ways of speaking that don't always come naturally in the moment. With role-playing, however, scripts will become second-nature and will build team members' confidence, not to mention help the practice get the desired results from patients.

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## 7. Ongoing Training

Although there is no set timetable for training staff members, dentists need to ensure that their teams stay up-to-date on the latest dental techniques as well as any changes in practice systems and protocols. Training may take the form of role-playing, brief one-to-one sessions, off-site continuing education courses or other learning situations. Not only will regular training result in more knowledgeable individuals, but it will also benefit the team as a whole as information is shared among members.

## 8. Strong Leadership

Most dental schools don't teach human resources or leadership, but as former football coach Vince Lombardi said, "Leaders are made, they are not born. They are made by hard effort, which is the price which all of us must pay to achieve any goal that is worthwhile." Practice owners must develop the leadership skills listed below so that they can lead their teams to success.

- **Doctors need to *show the team how they are expected to behave.*** Displaying a positive attitude even when things go wrong, maintaining a calm demeanor no matter how difficult a patient acts, and leaving personal problems at home are just a few of the characteristics dentists can model for their staff.
- **Practice leaders should be open to change.** As business conditions fluctuate—in the dental economy, in the local market and in the practice itself—the doctor should avoid clinging to the status quo. Flexibility and adaptability are essential attributes for dental practices today, and they cannot exist unless the dentist remains open-minded and willing to try new strategies for success.
- **Doctors need to master the art of decision-making.** Effective leaders learn to make firm decisions and make them quickly. This decisive approach sends a strong, encouraging message to team members—especially if the practice leader also authorizes them to make decisions themselves in their areas of responsibility.
- **Leaders need to keep the lines of communication open.** Team members should be encouraged to talk to the dentist about parts of the practice that need attention, such as wasteful spending that could be curtailed or ideas for how to improve the patient experience.

## Conclusion

Building an outstanding team is one of the biggest challenges dentists face, and it's a continuous process. By providing team members with tools, training and strong leadership, practice owners will enable their practices to operate like well-oiled machines and achieve their long-term goals.

*The 9 Areas of Expertise* cover every aspect of successful practice operation. By learning about these areas and seeking professional guidance and training to enhance all nine skillsets, practice leaders can grow their practices—and increase their personal satisfaction—in today's challenging economy.

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### Dr. Roger P. Levin

Dr. Roger P. Levin is a third-generation general dentist and the Chairman and CEO of Levin Group, Inc., the largest dental practice consulting firm in North America. A keynote speaker for major dental conferences, Dr. Levin presents more than 100 seminars per year. He has authored 68 books and more than 4,000 articles. In 2014, he received the Dental Excellence Award for Best Practice Management Consultant from *DrBicuspid.com*. For the past 12 years, he has been named one of the "Leaders in Dental Consulting" by *Dentistry Today* magazine.



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