



Your role in creating a thriving team

By Julie Parker

As a dental practice management consultant, I frequently hear the same complaint from practice owners and managers: “There are no good people out there”. It’s an understandable frustration - we know it’s tough out there for many professions and industries. But, what if this pervasive issue isn’t entirely about the people you’re hiring? What if the other half of the equation lies with the leadership?

I watched a Simon Sinek video today where he shared a powerful insight.

Simon spoke about his experience at the Four Seasons in Las Vegas, where a barista named Noah stood out for his enthusiasm and authenticity. Simon asked Noah whether he enjoyed his job. Noah responded that he LOVED his job. When Simon probed further and asked why, Noah said “throughout the day, managers will walk past me and ask me how I’m doing and if there’s anything that I need to do my job better”. He said, “not just my manager, any manager”. Simon reflected that Noah then said something magical. “I also work at Caesars Palace. There, the managers are trying to make sure we’re doing everything right. They catch us out when we do things wrong. When I go to work there, I like to keep my head under the radar and just get through the day so I can get my pay cheque”. Noah continued, “Here at the Four Seasons, I feel I can be myself”.

Simon surmised that Noah loved his job because managers at the Four Seasons regularly asked how they could support him, creating a sense of value and trust. In contrast, at his other job at a less supportive workplace, Noah admitted he kept his head down, avoided attention and did the bare minimum. The difference?



Leadership shaped an environment where Noah could thrive in one place and disengage in the other.

This principle applies to dental practices as well. Leaders often focus on finding the “right people” but neglect to ask whether they’ve built the “right environment” to enable those people to thrive.

I have been studying the work of Richard Barrett of late. Barrett is a leadership consultant, author and founder of the Barrett Values Centre, known for his expertise in organisational culture and values-based leadership.

Barrett has a great quote: “*If you want to change the culture of your organisation, you must either change your leaders, or your leaders must change*”.

Leaders are architects of the environment and the culture they create directly influences how team members show up.

Have you ever considered that you might already have the perfect team, but

they are simply reacting negatively to the conditions you’ve created?

Think about the last time you asked your team members, “What do you need to do your job better?” It’s a simple but transformative question. Often, leaders make assumptions about what’s needed without directly engaging their team, overlooking the practical, day-to-day challenges faced by those on the front lines.

This dynamic is one Charles and I often see in Australian Rules Football (AFL). A promising draft pick might fail to meet expectations and get dropped from their team, only to be picked up by another club where they excel beyond anyone’s expectations. What changed? The player didn’t fundamentally become more talented overnight; they stepped into a different environment, shaped by a different culture and leadership. The right environment allowed their potential to surface and flourish.

Diagnosing the environment you've created

If you're not sure how your leadership style impacts your team, consider starting with these reflective questions:

1. When was the last time I had a one-on-one conversation with a team member to understand their challenges?
2. Do I focus more on catching mistakes or celebrating successes?
3. Am I clear about the values and purpose of our practice and do I communicate them effectively to my team?
4. Do I create opportunities for team members to grow and align their work with their strengths?

The answers to these questions can be telling. Practices that cultivate trust and respect find that their teams naturally align with their goals and values. Conversely, practices that operate in a culture of fear or micromanagement find disengagement and turnover to be persistent problems.

A happy and engaged receptionist creates a positive first impression for patients. A supported and appreciated dental assistant ensures smoother proce-

dures and patient comfort. When every team member feels their contribution is valued, the entire practice benefits.

However, a toxic environment - characterised by micromanagement, lack of communication, or misplaced priorities - leads to disengaged team members who, in turn, deliver subpar patient experiences.

Building a culture of collaboration and growth

The good news is that creating a supportive environment doesn't require a complete overhaul. Small, consistent actions can lead to significant changes. Here are some practical steps to consider:

- **Foster open communication:** Implement regular check-ins with team members to understand their needs and address concerns;
- **Invest in growth:** Offer training and development opportunities that align with team members' aspirations and your practice's goals;
- **Model your values:** As a leader, demonstrate the behaviours and attitudes you want to see in your team; and

- **Celebrate wins:** Recognise achievements, no matter how small.

What if you could unlock the potential of your existing team by re-evaluating your leadership approach?

The journey to a thriving practice begins with self-reflection. When you shift your focus from blaming the people to examining the environment, you empower yourself as a leader to create lasting change. Remember, the best teams don't happen by accident - they are nurtured through intentional leadership.

About the author

Julie Parker is a Dental Practice Management Consultant and Team Educator. At the age of 33, Julie became the first non-dentist to own a dental practice in Australia. Julie is Co-Founder of Julie Parker Practice Success and Co-Founder of Dental Business Mastery. Visit julieparkerpracticesuccess.com.au and dentalbusinessmastery.com.au to find how Julie can help your dental practice be more successful through consulting programs, online courses, podcasts and more.