



Supportive questions that build confidence and culture

By Julie Parker

In our Dental Practice Management Course, we ask participants to reflect on meaningful experiences they've had with managers, owners or leaders—those moments that left them feeling energised, appreciated and confident.

One response recently stood out. It wasn't flashy or dramatic—it was deeply human.

"When I first started in the industry, the owner of the practice would come out to reception at the end of every single day and ask how my day had gone. What did I struggle with? What did I learn? What did I enjoy? Did I have any questions he could help with? This went on for at least six months and the value in that alone was absolutely gold for my confidence and learning. I try really hard to do the same now for anyone in my clinic who wants or needs it."

The magic in this story isn't just that a practice owner checked in daily. It's how he did it. He asked questions that signalled trust and interest. He invited reflection. And he showed up—consistently.

These small, intentional questions are often what create the strongest foundations in a dental team. They might seem like casual conversation, but they're so much more. They say, "I see you". "I care about your experience". "You're important to the success of this practice".

That kind of attention builds confidence and loyalty.

Too often, in the fast pace of dental practices, we fall into the habit of only addressing what's not working. There's a natural bias in leadership toward fixing problems. Someone runs late, a system breaks down, a patient complaint comes in and we jump in to solve it. And of course, that's part of the job. But if we're not mindful, we end up focusing exclusively on what's going wrong.

We stop noticing what's going right.

That's why these check-in questions are so powerful. They help us shift our attention. They create a bias towards noticing effort, growth and success, not just gaps and errors.

When a manager asks, "What did you learn today?" or "Was there anything you enjoyed?" it encourages a moment of pause and self-awareness. When a team member is asked, "What did you struggle with?" and is met with patience and support, they learn that struggling isn't failure, it's part of the process. And when someone asks, "Do you have any questions I can help with?" it signals that curiosity and growth are welcome here.

This approach does more than develop skills. It builds trust. It makes people feel safe. And when people feel safe, they're more engaged, more collaborative and more willing to stretch themselves.

The team member who shared this experience is now in a leadership role herself and she's modelling the very same behaviour. She's asking questions, offering support and paying forward what was once given to her. That's the ripple effect of great leadership.

It's easy to assume that good performance doesn't require feedback. "They're doing fine. No need to say anything." But silence can be a missed opportunity. It can leave people unsure of where they stand or unaware of how far they've come.

Intentional questions create a moment of connection that serves both people. The manager becomes more attuned to the individual's needs and the team member feels recognised, supported and more confident in their role.

From a culture perspective, this also invites a powerful shift: from one of correction to one of curiosity. We stop trying to fix people and start trying to understand them.

That leads to more meaningful conversations and stronger team relationships.

If you're in a leadership position in your practice, whether formal or informal, these are the kinds of questions that make a lasting impact:

- "What did you enjoy today?"
- "Was there anything challenging?"
- "What's something you'd like to feel more confident in?"
- "Do you have any ideas we should try?"
- "Is there anything I can help with?"

And you don't need to ask them all at once. Just pick one. Ask it sincerely. Make it a habit.

Like the practice owner in the story above, show up daily, even briefly and ask your team how they're going.

You might be surprised by what you learn and by how much your team members appreciate the chance to reflect and feel heard.

Because sometimes, the most powerful leadership doesn't come from solving problems - it comes from asking the right questions.

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.