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Connected and United Team Communication

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The Practice Profit Accelerator call is where we dive deep into the most pressing questions we're hearing from teams across North America.

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PPA Call

- Kevin: Good day everyone, and welcome to the latest edition of the Dental Success Today Practice Profit Accelerator team call. And it is with much excitement I welcome Maegen to the call today. Maegen, it's so great to be with you.
- Maegen: Nice to be here, Kevin. How's your day going?
- Kevin: Hey, listen, what is today? Wednesday? I don't even know what days they are anymore. They all blend together, but whatever the day is, I'm not going to complain. I have sunshine, blue skies, and nobody wants to hear it anyways, right? How are you doing?
- Maegen: I'm doing good. I like what you said: no one wants to hear it anyway. That's a great attitude. And actually I think a really nice segue into our topic today.
- Kevin: Yes, you're right. And it's interesting because, obviously, I heard what you and Scott did last month and we're going to continue to build on the momentum that you guys have by focusing on the priority of being, what I like to call being mindful of how effective we are in our communication. And today we're going to talk about one of my favorites, as you're well aware and many others, and that topic is on team communication. So I'm going to do my best today. I'm going to take the lead here because I feel very passionate about this subject matter because I'm sure all of you know, and I get called in to do a lot of work in this arena and I'm going to make an attempt in this brief period of time, because let's face it, I could do an entire weekend, maybe even a week, just on this subject matter alone, not that anybody wants to listen to me talk that long.
- But we're going to do our best to give a framework of how to assess. So this isn't about, here's what I'm doing right, here's what I'm doing wrong, playing the blame game, any kind of shame, anything of that nature. It's really just to point out where ineffective team unity in teams that aren't connected, it tends to boil down to communication. And the teams that are connected and are unified and doing well, although still have their own struggles with communication because let's face it, we're all human beings and we find ourselves in moments where we either don't put in the effort, aren't in the moment, aren't as mindful, but yet they still figure it out and keep it together.
- So I'm going to do all that I can, Maegen's going to be here to help support me as well, because she obviously thinks from a different perspective, and together, I think we're going to do some good things here and give you all an opportunity to be able to check in with yourselves with regards to how you're doing. So, Maegen, before I dive in, any words of encouragement here or any insights that you'd want to share before I get into the first point?
- Maegen: Well, I think Kevin, if anyone is the master on this topic, it would certainly be you. And I know that you help so many of our teams navigate this and just always trying to get closer, working better as a team, getting better outcomes for our patients. It all trickles down from the daytime family, as Scott calls it, and how strong the daytime family is. So I think it's a great topic. I know the

PPA Call

Maegen: whole DST universe is in good hands today with you guiding us through this and I'm looking forward to it. Let's dive right in.

Kevin: All right, let's do it. Well, no pressure here, but I'm pretty pumped. So here's the thing that I like to say when it comes to communication, whether we're talking about one-on-one communication, communication to a group, whatever it is, it all starts with us as human beings. Now I'm not going to go down the rabbit hole of, from an individual standpoint. But what I mean by it all starts with us is this: when we go into a scenario, whether it's a conversation with a fellow team member in our department, whether I'm crossing over and I'm front and I'm going to the back and I've got to go talk to one of our brilliant clinical minds, or I'm talking to leadership, whatever it is, is you've got to take ownership of how you are going into that conversation, about how much effort that you are going to put into it in order to be able to achieve a positive and productive outcome.

Because if you're going to come in, let's say you're having a bad day, and you're going to come into it and you're just going to carry that with you. And thus, maybe not even the words you say, but the tone and the energy and just the vibe, everything that you've got, all these things that surround you. If you bring that in with you, you're already starting out in a bad way with regards to whatever this conversation is about, whether it's a 30 second conversation or a 30 minute one. So we all have to do our best to manage ourselves, very similar to, we talk about, like we've done presentations on Brain Blocks, now we're doing Positive Intelligence, which is all about managing the mindset, managing what goes on the conversation that goes on within your mind. Well, we've got to be able to do a really good job with that in order to be able to set up the conversation that we're about to engage in, in a successful way.

And so that's why I start with: it's up to us! Because here's the reality and the one thing I know you all appreciate about me is that I tell it like it is, I do it with as much kindness and respect as I possibly can. You're the ones who create your own drama. You could eliminate so many of your own problems if we would just be mindful with regards to where we're at coming into the conversation. Attitude, energy, like I said before, word choice, things of that nature. And so Maegen, as a general umbrella, before we dive into some more of the particulars that we can assess ourselves on, I just wanted to turn it over to you because I know that you experience this from a different way of looking at it than I do only because I tend to find myself in a lot of the, unfortunately, the negative conversations.

Although, you know, trust me, I welcome the good ones and I have plenty of them, but I do find myself in the tough ones because I think I do a pretty good job of trying to get to a reasonable outcome for everybody involved so everybody wins. So anyways, having said that I'll table it there for just a second and have you jump in with anything you'd like to share on the overarching commentary about individuals taking ownership of how they're about to communicate.

PPA Call

Maegen:

I'm glad you started with the mindset part of it, Kevin, because it's so true. And I think something else to remember is if you're listening to this and you find yourself guilty of any of the things that you hear, it's not to feel bad about it, it's just to become a little bit more aware of where are we getting in our own way. And once we become aware of that, once we start to recognize and catch ourselves, you can start to shift to some of these strategies that are going to help you be able to respond better, to get to the solution quicker. And that's my number one thing I want to say for mindset just to give that umbrella: is be solution focused. This is what our best of our best teams do is they get right from the problem to a solution-focused mindset quicker than most other teams.

That is what sets them apart. So zoom out, when you're having a problem, when there's an issue that's happening in your day, maybe some, there's a timing issue, maybe someone's getting frustrated because they don't have what they need. These are real issues that can happen so zoom out, what's our collective problem. Okay, we're having stress in our day. How do we then get to a solution that we're going to get to together? We're on the same team. So when we can zoom out and see that collective problem of what's happening, we can start to then come back at it with a solution-focused mindset. And it changes the energy of the conversation just with that mindset shift. So just remember, we're on the same team. If you're feeling yourself getting a little bit upset or frustrated because you're not getting what you need from someone else, it's a great strategy. Zoom out, give each other the benefit of the doubt, and let's come back at this from that solution-focused mindset.

Kevin:

I love it, Maegen, because one of the things that you said without saying it is when you are going in looking for solutions, looking for positive outcomes, it means that we're detaching from an emotional connection to whatever the discussion is about. In other words, we can go into it and not take it personal! So many times a conversation goes the wrong way because somebody just refuses to either listen and hear the words being said, and the intention that is brought into the conversation and they turn it into something that it wasn't even meant to be. And that is a huge problem. And that's a tough one to get over because there's no facts behind it. It's like, how do you refuse the way somebody feels? I was literally in a conversation, couldn't have been but maybe a month ago, where this person just went totally off the rails on something I said because they just refused to listen.

They heard what they wanted to hear, didn't even hear it the right way. The whole, it was just a total mess. And it turned into this big ordeal. And in the end, please take this the right way, in the end I was right. And the reason I was right is because I didn't get emotional. I stayed focused. I stayed centered. I kept bringing it back to the issue, not about all the other peripheral that came with it because I didn't take the attacks that were coming at me in a personal manner. I realized, hey, this person is maybe, man, maybe something's going on with her today. Maybe she's having a bad day. Maybe something happened she hasn't told anyone, and I just happened to be the recipient of it. So, although I wasn't happy about the way that I was being spoken to, I still kept it in perspective.

PPA Call

Kevin:

I didn't take it as I'm this really awful person. And I stayed with, as Maegen, you just described there, I stayed focused on coming to a resolution, coming to a solution to something that was actually a very simple deal that turned into a much larger thing. And so I'm going to transition into, after supporting that commentary there, Maegen, into something that you also stated there, which is, you used the word, "quickly." I'm all about that, too. My first thing that I'm going to say here is a lot of times what happens is conversations end up being created around challenges, issues, whatever you want to call them, because we let things linger way too long. If something's bothering you, just bring it up in a respectful way. What the problem becomes, something happens throughout the day, you want to go talk about with somebody, but you're like, ah, I don't want to do it.

So then what happens? You start talking to coworkers that we're in alliance with, you start doing the gossip thing, and of course we're just looking for allies. Usually, we're not trying to have people talk sense into us, we want people who agree with us. So we're going to go to the people who we know are going to side with us and then just pile on. Then all of a sudden today, three weeks later, it really turns into this big deal, guess what? Problem hasn't gone away, just because we've ignored. It, it's actually mushroomed into something even larger because we didn't go to action right away. We didn't just have the respect and the decency to be able to go to whomever it is and talk about whatever happened so that we could just come to, as Maegen said, a solution. And if we just did that, I guarantee you'd cut half of the problems out right away.

If we just went to action, went to conversation, immediately. And what I mean by that is, you know, go in, think about it, think about your word choice, come in centered, reasonable, attitude, energy and all those kind of things and come at it from a very productive way because lingering does nothing good. No different than your patients, right? If your patients decide, "Well, you know that's not that big of a deal." And they just let the problem linger, well, what do we know that happens? It's an active problem. It's going to get worse. Well, guess what? Conversations left unsaid are an active problem and they're going to get worse, too. Maegen, what say you on this topic?

Maegen:

You know what, Kevin, I think it's beautifully said I don't have much to add on that particular topic, but it does remind me of just another, as we're talking about mindset, as we're talking about some of these really good strategies, like not waiting and really getting to things directly. I think it just reminds me of another pattern I see in the best of the best and the cultures that teams, that are rockstar teams have really created and continue to cultivate is this idea of servant leadership. And I know we're probably going to get into that in a little bit more so I won't jump ahead, but it just reminds me of that because I think that's another thing, is instead of dragging something out, really serving our team, it can mean getting to things quickly, making sure the mess doesn't spiral, this is called getting ahead of the game.

PPA Call

Maegen: So I don't want to jump too far ahead in that one, Kevin, I'll turn it back to you in case you had some points on that topic, but I would like to continue on that path of seeing the best in the cultures that we see being successful.

Kevin: Maegen, you make this so easy for me. You bring up these brilliant points in a concise manner and it's already going where I wanted to go. My gosh, I need to have you on all my phone calls, it's even easier! Anyway, what I'd love to dive into now, this is all in the vein of servant leadership, which by the way, anybody who's ever talked to me on this subject, and Maegen and Scott as well, is we believe we're here to serve. And if you go in with that kind of a mindset, it immediately helps to diffuse any kind of ego that you may have that gets in the way by the way, and nobody likes that anyways. And it gives you an opportunity to say, listen, something's going on, I want to help. You're having an issue, I want to help you. I'm having an issue, does somebody want to help me?

And it's like, we want to go into this and we want to be mindful that we want to offer grace and mercy, because I'm certain that anybody listening to this call today, me included, could use a little bit more of that. And by the way, you've got to give it to yourself, too. Sometimes we can be harder on ourselves than anybody else can, and we've got to be able to offer grace and mercy to ourselves. I've been using that phrase a lot! And I would say though, over the last year, I've probably used that at least half dozen times a day. And it's because I feel as if we've gotten so amped up about just anything and everything, that we're just carrying anxiousness with us, uncertainty with us, frustration with us or whatever the case is going to be.

And we've lost sight of the human aspect of these interactions that we're having, especially with your second family, with your team. Because in order to be united and connected, like I like to call it the "Connected Team Experience," is we have to be mindful of others around us. And to be able to support those who are low, because one day we're going to be low and we're going to need a little bit of support, too. And so offering grace and mercy, as well as, going into conversation thinking the best of each other. I'm amazed at how many times I run into situations after I assess them, of course they're my opinion, where I feel like someone's deliberately trying to bring somebody down, get somebody in trouble, make somebody not look in a good light for whatever reason, usually it's to make ourselves feel better or make ourselves feel more valuable.

It's not a really good way to do that. There's a lot of productive ways to be able to. But it's like, how do we not go in believing somebody on our team is genuinely trying to give their best, to do their best, to offer their best, to come to the end game, the outcome that we all have defined. And by the way, if there is somebody in your team and you can't say that about that person and genuinely believe it, well, then they're probably not part of your, they shouldn't be part of your team, because we view all of you as champions. And so we have an expectation of the contribution and effort people are going to make. And by the way, one thing you have to, here again, you're offering grace and mercy.

PPA Call

Kevin:

Sometimes we may get frustrated with somebody because, well, they're not putting in as much effort as somebody else, or I stay late, this person doesn't, and we start to become very judgmental. And one thing that we all have to understand is that we're all raised in different ways, and we all have different examples, who have been there before us to, basically, you know, create work ethic, commitment, effort, all those different kind of things. I'm blessed to have had my grandfather who was a farmer, everybody's heard me talk about my grandfather, my mother, my brother, my wife and my kiddos, I have all of these motivations sitting in front of me at the top of mind all the time, where this is just how it is. I know I got to put in the time. I know I got to put in the effort.

I know I've got to stay the course. I've got to see things through, but not everybody has had that example. And so to spin that, we have the opportunity, thinking the best of others, we have the opportunity to be the example for that person, to bring them along, because maybe they haven't had that in their life. And it's new to them and different to them instead of judging them about it, we try to be encouraging to them. So, Maegen, I'm going to pause there, before I change course just a little bit here, but what say you with regards to where I went with that, revolves around the servant leader standpoint you were talking about?

Maegen:

Beautiful. Beautiful example of grace and mercy you just shared at the end there. And I think that's such a nice way to put it as giving them the benefit of the doubt. They may not know and this is an opportunity for us to build our daytime family stronger. So I want to say, when you think about this, when you think of servant leadership, luckily for us, for you, myself and Scott, we only work with teams that offer servant leadership with their patients. That's a baseline. Everyone in our DST universe is very dedicated to their patients. And I think you all practice that and know that deep down. The next level up in our DST universe of really these amazing cultures you see, are people that do servant leadership amongst their team, how Kevin describes. So that idea, that energy of what can I do to help and being willing.

And if you see something not having that attitude of, that's not my job, or I don't have enough time, but rather really having that energy of how can I serve, what can I do to help you out? That's the next tier up. And if you keep going and you go up to the top tier of what I see, this is a little bit of an unusual version of servant leadership, but I think it suits it still. And that is when people can take true ownership of their part in the practice and their part in the patient experience, and be willing to boldly ask for what they need. And this is what they need to keep leveling up, to keep growing, to keep making the experience better for themselves, for the team, for the patients, and having the courage to put it out there with your team and really trusting that they will have your back in this and that they are going to want to serve you, too.

And people shy away from this because they think it seems like, "Oh, I don't want to ask. I don't want to bother anyone. I don't want to add anything to anyone's plate." But have faith. Have faith that if you put it out there, someone

PPA Call

Maegen:

will step up. Someone will see the value that when you win, everyone wins. When your part of the experience gets better, it's that connected team experience, that connected patient experience, it trickles through to everyone. So that's what I see at the very top tier is people own their stuff. They take responsibility and they don't settle for less. They really put out there what they need to get that 10 out 10. So when you're building toward this attitude, really consider that. And I'll give you a little example of a real thing that happened just this week with a team where I was lucky enough to be part of a meeting where I witnessed this happen.

And kudos to them, they had this discussion amongst themselves, and we were in a little breakout, and they came up when this idea where the treatment coordinator really laid it out there that, "Hey, clinical team, this is what I would need. And this and the handoff is exactly the information that will help me get better case acceptance. If you can use this phrase, if you can give me this information, I'm going to be able to really deliver on this patient's treatment presentation." And they all agreed, the team saw the value. And so again, credit to this team for pulling through and for that treatment coordinator to really boldly ask for what she needs, that is servant leadership. So little ways you can think about this and be honest with where you're at in your own culture and let's keep working, let's keep building. Because like Kevin said, everyone gets grace and mercy, everyone we want to give the benefit of the doubt and keep changing towards the culture that we really want to create. Kevin, pass it back to you.

Kevin:

I love the example you gave about this treatment coordinator situation, because it dovetails nicely into one of the other points that I had here in preparation, which is, be direct with kindness and respect. And I also added in, using less words tends to be better than just going on and on and on and on and on. That tends to show that you're really not prepared, not comfortable, whatever the case is going to be. But here's the example, the flip side of what you just described, which was a positive outcome, was treatment coordinator asks for these things boldly, as you say, well, guess what? The people on the other end of the request could have looked and said, "Well, who is she to be asking for all this? Why do I have to do all this? I'm not doing a bad job."

They could have taken it so personal, they could have taken it as an attack. They could have taken it as, "Oh, we're not doing a good enough job and you just wanted to call us out in front of everybody." And it's not what it was, right? The conversation you described was, "I'm a team member. We believe in the set up the next team member for success. Team, before me, here's what I could use to set me up for success, are you willing to do it?"

Hallelujah! That's what we're looking for! That's effective communication as a team and it was direct to the point; kindly, respectfully, asking in the vein of, and this is going to dovetail into my second point I want to make here, which is finding common ground. In other words, what's an initiative that we both can latch onto to, to say, "Yeah, that's where we want to go. And we may not have found our way there, but let's get there."

PPA Call

Kevin:

And it's not about blame, playing the blame game. That's exhausting. "Well, so and so's not doing this, or so and so's not doing that." As if what we do is perfection. Of course, it's not. The blame game never works. In fact, it creates additional problems that linger, that build momentum and go into other conversations that weren't even, that never should have come up, quite frankly. And so be direct: kindness, respect, let's get to the point and find that common ground. Don't blame others, bring others into the conversation, bring others into the solution-focused conversation, as Maegen put it so nicely before. Because if we can do that, if we can find common ground, if we can give a little, ask of a little, like this whole deal, it's the give and take model.

It's a beautiful way to be able to offer up suggestions, give some feedback, ask for help, make all these different kind of things where it can be misconstrued and taken personally if taken out of context or if not, if the person receiving it isn't paying attention, or quite frankly doesn't want to, or lives in the last point that I want to make here to put a trifecta together on this particular topic, is being in the mindset of looking at things negatively right out of the gates. Well, of course, where do you think this conversation is going to go? So you don't have to be sunshine and rainbows, jump up and down, pom poms in the air, all excited for what's coming, but let's at least be neutral. Let's listen intently. Let's make sure that we pay attention to the message and not be so focused on the delivery, because let's face it, all of you working in dental practices and specialty practices, you run a fast-paced life.

And as much as we all give our best effort, and we all want to have grace and mercy and all those different kind of things, there are going to be moments where the words are just coming out faster than we can even imagine. And I'm certain that there's plenty times you go like, "Man, I wish I would've said that a different way." But, if we're connected as a team, we never have to worry about it because we know that they're coming from the best of intentions. We know that they're coming with kindness and respect. We know that we're trying to find common ground and get to an end game solution. And if we do all of that together, and we piece all of that together, you will find such harmony, such connectedness, and you'll find the outcomes will be more positive in all different aspects and situations that you'll find in the practice, a lot less opportunity for drama, self-created problems and all those different kind of things. So Maegen, on those three points and then any final comments you have as we're getting close to having to wrap it up here.

Maegen:

Well, Kevin, we are on the same wavelength because you definitely covered exactly what I wanted to share as my final points of the best of the best. And I will make a case for positive reinforcement, positive feedback, compliments, shout-outs, letting people know what they did well today, "depositing in the positive tank," that's what I call it. And I think this is an absolute essential part of it. And sometimes you might think, "Oh, who has time?" Like Kevin said, who has time to be doing these things, but I'll make the case for it that the pattern I see with the teams with the highest standards, with the highest expectations, with the most dialed-in energy of being growth-minded, they are the ones that make the time.

PPA Call

Maegen:

And the reason I think it works is just the nature of operating with high standards and being in a growth-minded perspective there's a lot of constructive criticism going around. And that's good, we want that, we want feedback, we want to be talking about what's not going well so we can figure out how to make it better and be solution-focused.

It's important, but we have to balance it out because if all we're doing is having constructive criticism, that positive tank, it starts to deplete and the positive tank, well, that's the gas in the car. That's what we need to keep going. That's what makes people feel like at the end of the day; it was a crazy day, it was all hands on deck, maybe you didn't get lunch, maybe you didn't even get a bathroom break, but my goodness, it felt good when you got that shout-out where you really helped that patient have a major breakthrough, or someone saved the day and did something, pulled something off, that was really amazing that helped the whole team. That's how we start to get that positive tank filled up so we can get through the constructive criticism and growth that is necessary and good.

So I want to encourage you, even if at the very end of the day, maybe you have a shout-out board, maybe you have a little team messenger where you can send out the person of the day, whatever it is that works for you, even if it's just a simple looking your teammate in the eye and just saying, "Hey, I appreciate you. Thanks for hanging in there with me today." Just something like that, it makes a world of a difference and it truly is something that the best of the best, I always see the pattern in their team energy. So I wanted to leave it on that note, Kevin, I'll pass it back to you for final thoughts.

Kevin:

Listen, Maegen, wonderful way to bring it back into the world we love to live in, which is the world of positivity, the world of opportunity. And it's interesting because what you said there about the...it's what I would call the praise and acknowledgement. And my last two email messages that I wrote specifically can speak to this. In fact, the title of the one that I sent out on February 24th was, "The Power of Acknowledgement and Praise." I encourage you guys to go back and read it. If you've already read it, read it again. If you haven't, go find it. If you can't find it, send me an email, I'll forward it to you. But it's the whole point of how this can go a long way and add so much value to the culture that you guys are creating, the vibe and the energy that exists within the day-to-day workings of all that you do.

And then last week, I wrote one entitled, "Conundrum," and it's about this whole concept of the limiting beliefs, the self-imposed boundaries that are in place, that we just have accepted and choose not to break through and explore beyond and those kind of things. And the two of these together can combine into a wonderful opportunity for you to have a discussion as a team about this, regardless of where you are on the spectrum and the scale of your communication. If you're struggling, great, huge opportunity for you, if you feel like you're doing really well, yet have the champion mindset and always want to get better, here's an opportunity for you to do it.

PPA Call

Kevin: So, Maegen, thanks for being here. Great call. Like I said, I could talk for a week on this topic. We did our best to dive in, give you some of the heavy-hitters that you can use, and assess, and have wonderful team discussion about and see your own progress and evolution. Final comments from you, Maegen, before I sign us off here.

Maegen: Kevin, I appreciate you. Thank you for leading us through here and sharing the tips and to our entire DST universe, I appreciate all of you, too. And keep striving towards that dream team. I know it takes work to stay there, but it's worth it, and your daytime family is worth it.

Kevin: Amen. Maegen couldn't have said it better. Powerful points that you brought to it, together, what a combination, I so appreciate the time that I get with you.

All right friends, it's been great to be with you another month, can't wait for the next one, and I look forward to all the conversations and communication that we have in-between. But for now, thanks for listening to the latest edition of the Dental Success Today Practice Profit Accelerator team call. Keep up the great work everyone, look forward to our next time together. Take care now.