

Earning the Right to Lead

Team Champion Message:

By now, there is a new wave of young adults entering the adult world of full time employment, while leaving the influential years of high school and college behind. I believe most of these aspiring “kids” are more nervous about their future than the first day they entered a new school knowing few if any other kids at all. What a frightening proposition.

Not only are these individuals starting the next phase in life, they will seek out a new group of leaders who will project influence on the way they go about developing their careers and thought processes as they advance through this stage of life that is filled with uncertainty.

It is sad to say, many of these young adults will fall victim to the destructive influence of people they perceive to be leaders, who really have no qualifications or reasons to be in these positions. Leadership is much more than a title handed over by someone who simply doesn't want to deal with the headaches that come with certain aspects of a respective business.

I chose this month to discuss the core fundamentals of leadership because I believe it is important to reflect on what it takes to embrace such an important and influential role within an organization. For some of you this will be the first time you read anything like this message. For others it will be a great reminder to stay true to the core ideals that set the foundation for being a leader who gets results.

Although I have my own opinion as to the order of importance of the principals I will write about, I chose to put them in no particular order in this publication so you can make your own decision as to the rank from your perspective. Please understand, the qualities of a leader I share with you here is not a complete list. This is a sampling of key attributes I believe are non-negotiable when it comes to choosing someone to be in a leadership position.

Before I begin, I would like to share with you a quote from Dwight D. Eisenhower, whom I believe sums up leadership in a very simple, yet powerful way.

“Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it.”

Eliminate the Ego

Leadership does not equal power and control. I have witnessed too many people who are anointed a leadership position quickly spiral out of control believing they have the power to do what they want, when they want, by

saying anything that comes to mind. These individuals become the cancer to an organization forcing people to choose sides creating a division within a team of great people. These individuals won't last very long as it becomes very obvious the negative impact they are having.

In order to be an effective leader it is crucial you check your ego at the door. When given the opportunity to lead people it is imperative you enter into this agreement with gratitude. It is an honor to lead others. By accepting a leadership role it comes with great responsibility, not privileges or entitlements.

During my college years I worked in order to support myself, and all the expenses that came with going to school away from home. I worked for two very well-known companies in the athletic apparel and shoe industry. At the second of the two companies, I was asked to take on an assistant manager position within two weeks of working there. Management wanted me to train and lead the other employees after they witnessed my work ethic and command of the product knowledge of all we sold. It was not typical to have someone my age, at the time, to be in a leadership role.

Long story, short, my team and I went on to set records for growth and sales over the next couple of years. The reason I was able to do this is because I checked my ego at the door. I didn't think I was better or more gifted than anyone else. I was willing to share all of my techniques and knowledge with those who wanted to be great at their jobs.

I won them over by giving credit to everyone, keeping none for myself, as we were recognized for the tremendous work we were doing. I took the time to highlight and brag about all of the people who were doing great jobs, putting in a lot of effort and making a commitment to the success of the specific store we all worked at. It was magical! I still have a couple of those employees who stay in touch with me today and thank me for what I did to help them develop into the professionals they have become today.

It is NOT about who gets the credit. It is NOT about using others to move up the ranks.

Be Your Best Everyday...Set the Example

Everyone has something going on in life that can be a distraction or an excuse for not giving your best effort for the day. If we all gave in, and allowed circumstances to control our output, it would be a disaster.

Each and every day you have a choice when you walk through the practice doors. You can be your best and give 100% effort, or you choose to not give your best effort, which has a direct impact on your fellow team members and patients.

I must say, I am disappointed every time I have to deal with this particular issue because I cannot understand how someone can believe they are at their best, right here, right now, with no room to improve...really!

When I have the opportunity to share my story, I point out how much I read and crave information to continually improve myself personally and professional. I know I will go to my grave never reaching perfection, but I will have strived each and every day to be better. I adopted this attitude from my Grandfather who was a farmer and the most influential man in my life. I miss him tremendously. To this day he is my role model and inspiration.

I believe it is important to identify someone who can help hold you accountable for your actions and efforts. Who is the one person you do not want to disappoint? Whose heart would you break if he/she knew you were coasting through life not giving it your all? Who is the person you would love to make proud by knowing the influence you are having on patients to live happy and healthy lives?

The power of association can be the single greatest motivating factor when it comes to consistently delivering your best while on the clock. My Grandfather is “on my shoulder” all the time, giving me guidance and inspiration as I think about what he would do as I find myself in situations when I am tired, frustrated and at my wits end. He reminds how important it is to press on because someone out there needs my best TODAY!

Let’s face it, we all should give our best effort daily out of our own commitment to personal integrity and character. Your doctor is paying you a daily wage for your best. If you aren’t giving your best, does that mean you are stealing from him/her? I would argue you are! Harsh I know...but I believe it is the truth. You can justify it all you want, but you are getting paid to perform at a certain level, and if you aren’t then shame on you.

My final point on this matter is this...your patients are counting on you everyday to help them live healthy lives. If you decide to mail it in one day because you are tired, fighting with your significant other, or any other reason for the matter, then your patients that day will leave your practice without getting the attention they need to make decisions affecting their health and happiness. That is on you!

You will go on with your day knowing you ignored your responsibilities. If you are OK with that, then we need to have a much different discussion. When you chose to be in dentistry, you chose to care by default. Your best effort every day shows you care!

I know some of you will not appreciate this message because you are part of the problem when it comes to having a great team dynamic and an extraordinary culture others would love to be part of. I write this in support of the majority who care enough to want everyone to be on board with this type of attitude when it comes to executing on the daily plan to further our mission of helping patients become happier and healthier.

My desire is this message sparks a shift in attitude by posing personal challenges to all of you who need a motivating factor to rise up and give 100% of the gift you have been given to make your team great!

This is what real leaders do!

Be the Voice of Reason...Stay Calm and Collected

I like to share a very simple phrase with people on a regular basis to help you stay cool, calm and collected when faced with challenging situations. It goes like this...

“Pause...take a breath...think through the situation...and RESPOND.”

I believe we create our own problems more often than not because we choose to REACT rather than RESPOND in a reasonable manner. When we react it tends to lead to unnecessary drama and conflict among team members. So many unfortunate conversations and situations could be avoided if we simply took the time to think through what is happening when deciding what to do/say next.

Leaders are the voice of reason. They have calm demeanors. They handle people with grace and kindness. We all are leaders in life. Our patients look to each of you as influential leaders when it comes to their health and happiness. Everyone involved in the patient experience has the power to influence patients...to lead them towards better health.

When I was in my early 30's I was under massive amounts of stress stemming from my personal life. There was a period of time when I let this impact the person I was as a leader. People took guidance from me more out of fear than they did respect. I was blind to this fact. It wasn't until someone had the courage to point it out to me and have an uncomfortable conversation to wake me up. Once I realized this and accepted I was intimidating people, I quickly got to work on changing my persona.

My biggest fault was I would react to anything and everything happening around me. I escalated situations when they clearly didn't have to be. I was causing more problems and more work simply because I was making the decision to be a jerk more often than being kind to others. My Grandfather would not be proud of my actions.

I made the decision to slow down and accept the fact that I could not control everything. I examined what was happening around me so I could better analyze the proper decisions to make. I took a breath. I paused. I RESPONDED with respect, care and concern. I woke up to the fact that I was dealing with another human being who deserved my best. They deserved to be treated with kindness and compassion. They deserved to have me be a real leader, not someone who had the title of President of a company. I was ashamed of my behavior prior to understanding what I was doing to others.

After making the changes necessary to be better and more effective as a leader I was able to positively influence

others to make better choices leading to better results. Very quickly I started to see my circle on influence expanding full of people who were more than happy to help me when I wanted to accomplish an objective. I was introduced to more influential people. I was falling into opportunity that once avoided me. Life became easier. People actually loved being around me again.

People respond positively to those who show strong composure in challenging situations. They want to feel protected and supported by someone who is in a role of influence. People want to listen to a voice of reason. They welcome the message.

I encourage you to always work on being this voice of reason. “Pause...take a breath...think through the situation...and RESPOND.” You will gain the respect and commitment from so many in your life!

Influence Others to Be Extraordinary...Get Them to Believe

One of the most common questions I get is, how do you get team members to change their attitudes and buy into change? It is unfortunate that we have to spend time on this due to the Resistance people give off as they fight personal and professional improvement.

The list is long when it comes to reasons why some people choose to live a life being “average.” They have no goals, no purpose, no reason to strive for excellence. That is why those of us who choose to be extraordinary attract so many people who want to be part of our circle. There is something about a person who has a great vibe and energy about him/her. They look up to those of us who make this choice and secretly want it, but don't believe they are capable of living an extraordinary life, or even worse believe they don't deserve it.

I encourage you to identify one person who you believe would be open to your positive influence. Someone who you can tell would love to make a personal shift and enjoy life and work more. Be their personal guide to achieving more by making a commitment to personal growth. This is how we positively impact the culture of your practice. One person at a time until the majority see the vision, believe it and make a commitment to it.

I have been blessed with the opportunity to have a positive influence on thousands of people over the years. One of the most common testimonies I receive from people I have helped is the fact I bring out the power of someone to believe they can accomplish more in life than originally thought possible. I do this by genuinely listening to people, asking the right questions and offering insight into what lies within their heart and soul. Most people have never been given “permission” to be extraordinary. I know it sounds silly but this is what some people need.

As example, when I struggled finding my way in my first career, after graduating college, I sought the help of a business coach to have a breakthrough. The summary of this experience is quite simple.

My coach looked me in the eyes and told me I already had the skills needed to be great, I just needed to give myself permission to let it out into the world. In other words, I already had the skills necessary to succeed and simply needed to trust I could have an impact on others.

From that day forward I never looked back. When I reflect on the stories people shared with me over the years it is humbling to believe I had that kind of positive influence. To this day, I still do not know the full reach of my efforts over the last 20-25 years in helping people. Keeping this in mind is a significant motivator for me to keep striving to influence others to be extraordinary.

You have a gift to share, one that could impact the direction of another person's life. Please share your influence. Help others believe what is possible when you join forces to have a concentrated effort to produce results that have a positive impact on everyone, including your patients.

Do the Work

Right now you have the power to be a person of influence. You can be the linchpin of your organization. You can lead your team to victory!

Choosing to be a leader means you are willing to do the work. You will strive to be better every day. You acknowledge there is room for growth. You will pay attention to what is happening around you and act accordingly to create the best opportunity for a positive outcome.

Congratulations to those of you making this choice! I support you and applaud you! You are the reason I wake up wanting to help advance your mission. Thank you for giving me purpose. It is the greatest gift any person could ever give to me. Together we can accomplish great things in life and dentistry.

Let's do the work!

Today, choose to be extraordinary!

-Kevin