“Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.” --Andrew Carnegie

In my travels as ADAA President and career experience spanning a quarter of a century, I have had the opportunities to observe several different types of dental settings and share practice management tips with assistants worldwide. It is one of the highlights, being able to talk shop and learn what works and what is essential to the daily working of a successful clinic. Many of the common struggles are shared by more than one type of dental practice and almost all have the same goal – providing top-notch services to our patients by an exceptional dental team, particularly when short-staffed.

The “T” in the TEAM concept represents the talent of the dental team. These talents and diversity may often be intertwined because any time a group of individuals come together for the purpose of accomplishing a goal, there will always be an extensive range of opinion, talents, and abilities. Many times these different approaches are influenced by culture and individuality, but they also can be influenced by career experience. As the team comes to understand the benefits and importance of each member and his or her role within the practice overall, the team begins to perform more effectively and produce tangible results.

The “E” in the TEAM concept presents the opportunity for educating as well as learning. As situations present themselves, members come to understand that each member may present a unique approach or solution to practice obstacles or overall goals. As members work together and brainstorm, varied backgrounds present an assortment of thoughts. Where one team member felt their approach was best, the experience of another shows that yet another approach is better suited for the situation at hand. The opportunity to learn is presented. As the team makes strides and begins to accomplish goals, the overall morale of the team begins to increase and becomes a foundation on which to build and further grow upwards. In the early stages, perhaps the members were in a competitive mode in an effort to prove their worth to the team. As the group moves toward more cooperation, they begin to see the larger picture unfold before them and begin to understand the scope of what may be accomplished when the talents and abilities of all are focused on the objective of the practice.

The “A” in the TEAM concept represents achievement. Both praise and criticism are essential pieces of the puzzle found in most workplace situations. Both are useful tools and must be used effectively to achieve practice goals. Praise is a wonderful thing for an individual or group to experience collectively. As human beings, we all enjoy and even strive for the praise of others no matter how small or large; it simply makes us feel as though we are doing the right thing and are being recognized for our efforts. However, both praise and criticism can have a negative impact upon a team. The team that accomplishes a goal may be praised for doing so, but if the team is capable of even greater things, this should be communicated. The opposite also holds true in that criticism should be accompanied by solution. If an individual or group is criticized for some reason, then the criticism should be constructive and followed up with suggestions as to how the situation could be circumvented in the future. Both praise and criticism are useful tools, but when used improperly, the team’s integrity is put at risk.
The “M” in the TEAM concept represents motivation. A happy practice environment should be a No. 1 goal because satisfied team members are more likely to provide satisfying service to their patients. The team needs motivation every day and should have the mindset that challenges are welcomed and viewed as a necessary part of a successful dental practice. Challenges should be faced with confidence and viewed as opportunities whenever possible. The team that pulls together and works through challenges, both positive and negative, will ultimately gain strength as a group from the experience. The team that works through challenges and employs a can-do rather than can't-do spirit comes to understand that there is strength in numbers and more can be efficiently achieved. This is essentially a positive mental approach rather than one that is defeatist in nature, which lends itself to failure.

Finally, as the dental team accomplishes its practice goals, there should be a sense of success and accomplishment. Where there were once individuals, there is now a team. Where people acted in the best interest of self, they now act for team. When the team is unified and becomes a unit that works through challenges and difficulty, the result is often success. The pride of accomplishment is very powerful and when individuals come to realize previously untapped potential and accomplish a goal, the inner feeling of success is experienced by all involved. This sense of accomplishment and success is an extraordinary building block for future team work and long-term practice success. Once this level is achieved, the sky is often the limit for what the team feels it can accomplish.

These same concepts can be applied to our association, and we tend to build upon one another. Ideas are always welcome, as well as the passion and drive to learn and lend a hand. Best of luck to each and every one of you. You all are vital members of your team and to your profession. May your practices flourish and your motivation inspire others! Keep up the great work!

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