



Team Talk

3.11.11

Question from Team Member “S”: During our staff meetings we have been doing some training on goal setting for our practice, patients and how to ask better questions. Not everyone is on board and say they don’t see any value in doing this. How do we build value for these activities and what tips do you have for asking better questions?

Answer from Deb: All growth lies in the territory of the unknown. Questions and goal setting are essential for lifetime growth. When I see an engaged team going through a renewal process they always ask lots of questions and eagerly set goals.

Practices that are in maturity and decline may have a team that thinks they have all of the answers. For many, their sense of security and self image depends on having all of the answers and never being wrong. As a result they try to understand everything in terms of what they already know. They rarely question their results and don’t set regular goals.

Why are questions so powerful? You can’t ignore them. You might chose to ignore them but the question will always be there provoking new thoughts. Answers on the other hand are closed-ended. You can file them away and never think of them again. This is why people find them comforting. It’s this sense of comfort that can be deadly to a practice.

Author Dan Taylor has been asking himself a great question for over twenty years. Its *“what do I have to become to get all that I want?”* This is a great question for every team to ask.

Some suggestions for asking questions:

Avoid questions that begin with the word "why." They tend to sound argumentative. Think about beginning questions with, who, what, when, and how.

Ask open ended questions. It will prevent the questions being answered with one word or a brief statement. An open ended question would be like this - *“What can we do to exceed your expectations?”*

When you ask a question be sure you take the time to listen to the answer. For a person to truly open up and share they need to know that the person asking the question really cares to hear their answer, plus if you listen they will want to you to answer their questions in the future.

Don't criticize the answer. Nothing will stop communication faster than this.

Don't bombard a person with a whole lot of questions. Your conversations should not feel like an interrogation. You will need to share something of yourself to build rapport. See the YouTube site below for a refresher on how to use the Johari Window. It is a cognitive behavioral tool that helps people better understand their interpersonal communication and relationships.

Don't fear the "pregnant pause." After you've asked a question don't hurriedly interject follow-up comments. Even if the silence is excruciating don't jump in and try save them, just wait and they will respond even if you do nod off first.

Examples of strong questions for your patient interactions:

1. How healthy do you want to become?
2. Could you tell me about your dental history starting as far back as you can remember?
3. Have you established goals with your previous dentist or hygienist?
4. Are you looking for crisis care only or a long term relationship?
5. What is your budget for dentistry?
6. Putting your name in our appointment book is a bond of trust between two professionals; do you see any barriers to maintaining your appointments?
7. Your insurance was purchased on your behalf by your employer. What questions do you have about your payment assistance program?
8. What are you willing to do, to keep your teeth for a lifetime?
9. You are missing 30% of your natural teeth, how does that make you feel?
10. Your plaque/bleeding scores are below 70% not the goal of 90%, what are you willing to do to improve your scores?
11. What kind of commitments do you expect from us?
12. Interruptions in treatment phases lead to further breakdown and problems. Once we agree to a plan how committed are you to completing it?
13. May I have your permission to review your treatment plan with to make sure we are on track with the goals you set for yourself?

My swim coach has competed internationally, understands the power of goal setting and always asks *"Deb what goals you set for yourself this evening?"* At first it was to avoid ending up on the bottom of the pool and getting introduced to the defibrillator. But through her coaching, goal setting and my commitment I have goals for myself have gotten me through the miserable dog paddling stage and into looking forward to my lessons.

If your team continues to resist, it's quite possible that you may need to "renew the team" or take them through the rehiring process.

"Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work."
Thomas A Edison

Suggested reading or tools:

- Visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-7FhcvoVK8s> for a great video on understanding the Johari Window.
- [Why am I afraid to tell you who I am](#) - by John Powell.
- Email me if you want information on the rehiring process.

Questions or feedback? Email Debra Hewitt at deb.hewitt@cox.net