

Turning Your Staff Into a Team

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In the book *Good to Great*, author Jim Collins uses a bus analogy to make a point about building a great team. Collins says you have to get the wrong people off the bus, the right people on the bus, and then get those right people in the right seats. That's excellent advice, but it's only part of the story. Once you have everyone on board and your bus motoring down the road, how do you keep from having to pull over every few miles to reassign seats, study the map, settle squabbles, and make repairs?

As I review my current list of consulting and coaching clients I realize that most of the challenges they experience in their practices are not related to systems, patient volume, or even marketing. Their biggest problems are not even about money. No, the issues that cause practitioners to seek out my services more often than not are people-related. It is one thing for a practice leader to have good working relationships with each individual in the office; it requires different skills altogether to assemble, lead, and be a member of a cohesive team.

Teams do not spring up magically. Building a team involves a dedicated process, the outcome of which is commitment to mutual goals and shared accountability for achieving results. Basic elements of team building include:

- Being clear about purpose, expectations, and common goals.
- Having explicit ground rules about how the team will work together to accomplish goals (including delegation, fairness, behavioral rules).
- How feedback and conflict is handled, decision-making, sharing of authority.
- Setting achievable performance goals (short-term and long-term).

While team building does require time and effort, the benefits of having a high-functioning team cannot be overstated. Some of these include increased trust, enhanced performance and productivity, job satisfaction and staff retention, shared purpose, and a sense of community. A happy bus, good traveling companions. The absence of teamwork, in contrast, will show up as the avoidance of accountability, frustration, resentment, suspicion, and lack of commitment. Who would want to travel on that bus?

What kind of atmosphere and environment do you want to create – for your patients, for your staff, and for yourself? If your choice is to build a vibrant team, then you (along with your team leader or office manager) can help make that happen with these practical steps:

- Set a good example by being consistent in your policies and interactions with staff.
- Commit needed resources to staff development and then follow-up with ongoing support to ensure effective learning and skill building.
- Encourage open discussion and active problem solving to promote accountability, trust and tolerance for diversity.
- Offer both casual feedback and formal evaluations so that staff members always know where they stand.
- Deal with issues that do crop up in the office quickly and fairly to demonstrate your commitment to having a safe, harmonious office.

Bear in mind that team building is a long-term process. However, don't be surprised if you notice a positive change within just weeks or months as a result of simply focusing your energy on team development. Try not to get discouraged if some team members are resistant to change or hold back in their efforts. View this as hidden opportunity to confirm your strong intention to move forward and create a team that is empowered to accomplish results. Even reluctant travelers will come around once they realize they are on a safe and interesting journey with you in the driver's seat.