

MAKE IT FUN

and make it happen!



Here's how one dentist incorporates fun into his practice ... and he and his team both benefit.

Let's face it. **Any of your Type A team members can get the same paycheck or maybe more money somewhere. Why do they come to work every day?**

I asked one of my hygienists, Bridget, "Why do you come to work at Unique Dental Care every day?" Her reply was, "Because every day I am greeted by smiling people who are glad to see me and every day we do something fun or silly to relax and stay strong and positive for our patients."

I frequently get phone calls from colleagues asking me how I have managed to keep my team members loyal for so long. I tell them, "I keep it fun, I give them a sense of achievement, and I give them positive reinforcement." The sense of achievement and positive reinforcement is self explanatory. How you incorporate "fun" on a daily basis into your dental practice needs a little more explanation.

My practice has been running strong for 11 years. Many of my original employees are still loyal and committed to me and my vision. Last year, I decided to really emphasize the "fun" in our work. I created a game called "Three Wishes." I asked each of my team members to write down three wishes on a piece of paper. I did not explain why. I just informed them that they had to do it. The wishes were

to be something they would love to have or do if a genie were to grant them a wish; something that perhaps they could not afford or did not have the time to do. They all did as I asked and then I confirmed that they were satisfied with what they had written since it could not be changed later.

Here is how the game I created incorporates fun in the dental office. For one year's time, every month we worked as a team and met our monthly office goals, one of the staff members would be granted one of his/her wishes. The staff would be involved in the decision of who would have his/her wish granted. The staff would vote anonymously for the person in the office who he/she felt worked above and beyond and in a team manner for the office to reach its goal. The only rule was one could not vote for oneself. Employees could win more than once. Last year, we reached our monthly goal 10 times and I granted 10 wishes to 10 different team members. It was a lot of fun and everyone got into it, sometimes campaigning and joining together. My team appreciated the game so much and lots of fun memories were created because of it.

Our office then made up another game called the "hair

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contest.” I asked my team members who wanted to participate to come in and have their picture taken with their hair nicely done up. The “panel” of judges would vote and the winner received a gift certificate. That contest led to a similar one called the “make-up” contest using the same principle and the same prize received after the voting. By this time, whenever I announced an office game, the entire staff was eager to participate and have fun.

The next game was this: I asked the entire staff to meet at the office at 7 p.m. on a Saturday night. They were to dress nicely and the evening was to be a surprise. They all did as they were instructed. At 7:15 p.m., a black stretch limousine pulled in, I opened bottles of champagne, and we all headed to the Boston Symphony and then to an upscale dinner overlooking the city. At the restaurant, one of my hygienists said to me, “What is so impressive about this night is that you took time out of your busy schedule and made all the arrangements from your heart. It makes us feel how much you care for us.”

I am sharing some of these ideas with you because they are ways to help promote a stress-free office — an office

where your team members will sometimes come to socialize with their coworkers even on their days off. We feel like a family. We care for one another. We help one another. No daily task is beneath any of us. If a team member is running behind or handling a time-consuming duty, another will help. If my assistants are busy, I will sterilize instruments or take out trash. Teamwork in an office creates not only good production, but good fun.

For the last 10 years, I have never had a team member come to me and ask for a raise. We do provide yearly evaluations but anytime before or after, I may take a high performing member to my office and give them a raise or maybe just praise. When a staff member does something wrong, I use the incident as an opportunity to learn from it. When they go out of their way for the benefit of a patient or each other, I will give them a 30-second praise to thank them. Those 30 seconds are the most important of their day.

In January of this year, I decided my team has mastered the art of loyalty, commitment, and dedication, and have worked so hard to achieve those qualities. I decided that our goals should not be the sole reason for a reward, because by now, I realize they are going to work to their optimum potential regardless. I decided to meet with my team and have them decide what “fun” we could do and where we could go to have fun as a team and as a unique family. We are headed to a four-day vacation to Cancun in May. Surely that will be “fun in the sun.”

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