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Volume 9 • Issue 5 • October 2009

Team Building After Staff Turnover: What Makes a Group/Staff Effective

Those of us who have been in the job force for any amount of time have lived through changes in staff. Sometimes we were glad to see a certain person leave to work elsewhere, especially if they were a “do-it-my-way” type or a poor performer. Other times, if a team player or a great performer left, we felt badly because we came to respect, appreciate and value the person. Most likely we considered them our friend. Either way, there was a disruption in the functioning of the staff/group and rebuilding was needed.

Let's take a look at what needs to happen to make a group (such as your dental office staff) function efficiently and effectively. Various functions are at play in any group that wants to accomplish its goals. Any collection of people will have a wide variety of goals, values and skills. However, a real *team*, whether large or small, is comprised of people who are thought of together, and who are consciously directed toward a common goal, much like in a dental office, a department in a store or business, or the wait staff of a restaurant.

Team building is a complex process. After a well-liked employee leaves, it may take some work to rebuild the camaraderie that previously existed. Understanding the theory behind team building will help.

Team Building Theory

The minimum requirements for the formation of a stable group consist of the following:

- **Acceptance:** Group members must feel accepted, secure, wanted and needed. In turn, they will accept and trust fellow members.
- **Communication:** A communication system must be in place which allows team members to communicate hopes, beliefs and knowledge. This can be through staff meetings, email messages, “open door” policies, and/or smooth information flow between departments (like the front desk and treatment areas).
- **Organization:** The group's structure must be understood and accepted by team members. They should play an active role in developing the structure and its control. Structure and control bring about a degree of interdependence and trust among team members.
- **Motivation:** To motivate staff members, it is important to identify the team's common goal(s). Individuals are motivated toward action when there are clear, defined, and achievable goals. Talents and skills are readily tapped, progress is celebrated and mutual respect abounds.

Group Functions

When functioning as a member of a group, each person in that group behaves in certain ways. A person who wants to succeed should be able to work effectively with other people—this is especially

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important in small groups. For the group to be successful, each individual's needs in the group have to be met. For that to happen, each person has to be seen, heard, respected and accepted. The growth and cooperation of the group depends on how the members provide for each other's needs and develop a sense of loyalty to the group. The success and achievement of the purposes of the group and the fulfillment of the tasks is dependent on how the members carry out the various functions that influence their process and effectiveness.

There are three kinds of functions (needs) which, when they exist within a group, ensure that the group functions effectively and efficiently. The group takes on an atmosphere of permissiveness and friendliness. Information passes through the group easily, and there is a spirit of acceptance. Members can freely share their thoughts and input. The three kinds of group needs include:

- Individual needs – to be respected, heard and accepted.
- Group maintenance needs – resulting in growth, coordination, cooperation, communication and care for others.
- Group tasks – to ensure that the the team's goals and overall purpose are achieved.

Everyone in a group has personal needs within the group that have to be fulfilled. However, team members must also understand and recognize their own responsibility to recognize and perform other activities that will move the group forward. See Chart 1 at the end of the newsletter for a description of each of these functions.

Individual Functions

Group effectiveness is achieved when all three kinds of needs are satisfactorily met. Performing one's individual function

may help to meet two or three needs of other individuals in the group simultaneously. Any person in the group, whether they are the chairman, designated leader, or member may perform needed functions.

When a group is bogged down, try to identify if there is a need that is not being met by one or more of the members. Then perform it or encourage someone else to perform it. Likely, it will set the group back on a productive path.

Examples of individual needs which must be met include:

- Accepting
- Affirming
- Including
- Valuing
- Comforting
- Treating equally

Group Maintenance Functions

Group maintenance functions are those which alter or maintain the group's pattern of interaction, and strengthen and/or perpetuate the group. Any member of the group may perform these functions. It is very helpful for group members to be aware of the various functions and take it upon themselves to perform them when they see the need.

Examples of maintenance functions are:

- Encouraging
- Expressing group feelings
- Harmonizing
- Compromising
- Gate-keeping
- Setting standards
- Energizing
- Regulating

Group Tasks Functions

Group tasks are activities that advance the group and help it reach its goals. Examples of these activities are:

- Initiating
- Information or opinion seeking
- Information or opinion giving

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- Clarifying or elaborating
- Summarizing
- Consensus tester
- Assessing resources

As a leader, it is important to do a little self-analysis to become aware of the functions that you perform when in a group. Very often, we find ourselves performing the same functions many times over. They fit our personality. However, by becoming aware of other functions and recognizing that they are not being performed, you can become a moving force, advancing the group dynamic.

For example, you may be aware that someone has not contributed to the discussion for most of the meeting. Use the inclusion function to invite that person to express what they feel about the topic. Often, individuals who are a bit timid or who are fearful that their opinion will not be accepted will not participate. By inviting them to express their feelings, they will feel accepted and valued.

Chart 2, “What is My Style in a Group? Task and Maintenance Functions,” refers to analyzing your own behavior in a group. You may be very comfortable clarifying what is going on in the group and perform that function frequently. Look at the chart and determine some of the functions that you perform the least. Then determine which you could perform without too much difficulty. Make an effort the next time you are in a meeting to practice one or more of the other functions to advance the group.

Behaviors That Hamper Progress

Each person brings to a group his or her own interests, abilities, attitudes, feelings, experiences and expectations. Each person acts in a different way in a group. Some contribute to the group by building it up, or maintaining it, or helping the group get the job done. Maybe you notice that others are good at satisfying individuals’ needs. Others may try to satisfy their own needs, and as a result, hamper the advancement of the group. Some behaviors individuals exhibit when their needs are not met include:

- Blocking. Disagreeing and opposing everything that is brought up.
- Seeking recognition. Calling attention to oneself, talking to be heard over the voice of others, and/or boasting.
- Dominating. Subordinating or downgrading contributions made by other group members. Making fun of them.
- Pulling into their shell. Refusing to take an active part in any discussion or decision.
- Making irrelevant comments. Injecting thoughts not in keeping with the current topic, holding side conversations with others in the group, being critical and judgmental of others’ ideas.

See Chart 3 for more examples of behaviors that hamper progress. What do you do about them? The growth and coordination of the group depend on how all members provide for each others’ needs. Reflect on the individual needs of the person who is exhibiting aggression or some other hampering behavior. Think of what they may be seeking: recognition, acceptance, personal help, clarification, inclusion, etc. Then, put your skills to work and provide the acceptance, inclusion or whatever you determined may be missing or needed. You will be creating a sense of loyalty to that person and that person in turn will develop a sense of loyalty to the group.

Stages of Development

Just as an individual goes through stages of development in their life, a group also goes through stages. In fact, the group may repeat stages when a change occurs, such as when a person leaves the group and someone new joins, when job responsibilities change, when new techniques are introduced, or after specific staff members attend advanced training in certain areas.

Groups, staffs, teams or whatever name you want to call them have disruptions no matter how much we like to pride ourselves in having a “well oiled

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machine.” When disruptions occur, the chemistry of the group changes.

Team chemistry is critical to the performance of a successful practice. Unfortunately, we often forget the importance of team chemistry. When adding a new person to a group—even if the person comes with high qualifications and has good experience—rebuilding will be necessary. It cannot be taken for granted that the new person will automatically fit in with the group. Expectations may be high and time limited, but training and an introductory conversation to outline goals and expectations are indispensable. Neglecting training and making excuses for not taking the time to explain the practice’s goals, what is important to the group, who to go to when questions arise, and what the employee’s responsibilities will be—or letting them figure it out for themselves—would be a big mistake!

When integrating a new member into the group, these group dynamics concepts will be very useful:

- knowledge about how groups work,
- understanding how group chemistry is developed,
- identifying the stages of group development,
- deciding where the group is in its development, and
- observing how individuals function within the group.

How a Group Develops

As you read through these stages, picture in your mind where your office is. You may be able to see where things have gone wrong or where they have gone right, with the result being group cohesiveness.

As mentioned before, groups go through stages of development. So, when a major change occurs, special attention should be taken to determine what stage the group is in. The four stages of group development are **groping**, **gripping**, **grasping** and **grouping**. The group may not develop

in that order, nor do all groups go through all the stages. In addition, a group may slide back and forth between the stages from time to time.

Groping stage: During this stage, there is a general lack of understanding among the members of the group. Each individual tries to find his or her place in the group. The group is “individual centered.” Individuals will not generally trust the other members. There may be some attacks, and negative feelings may come out during discussions as each person tries to make his or her way into the group.

Gripping stage: This is the stage during which there is a period of discouragement, discomfort, conflict and frustration. Some members may have found their position in the group, while others are not yet comfortable so they exhibit behaviors that are not productive. During this stage you may see people avoiding problems, withdrawing from the group, or joking around as a means of directing attention to themselves. Others may ridicule the opinions of others. These are signs of conflict and will cause frustration to those who are trying to bring harmony to the group.

Grasping stage: A group in this stage shows signs of making an effort to consolidate ideas, develop harmony, reconcile disagreements, reduce tension or explore differences. They are willing to compromise, even when their own ideas are in conflict with others, admitting to making errors in an effort to bring about group cohesion. Passing through this stage will bring a more comfortable feeling among members and many will begin to see how they fit into the group.

Grouping stage: With one letter change in the word, *groping* turns into *grouping*. Members develop a sense of purpose—there is a feeling of acceptance for one other, others’ ideas are considered valid, and they are given credit for their ideas and opinions. Members praise and appreciate others, they really

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listen to what others say and suggest, and recognize that group-centeredness has developed. They are working together for the common good.

A Big Must

Staff meetings. Refer to the August 2007 issue of Hot Buttons for the article entitled, “Staff Meetings: Focus on the Positive.” During your meetings, discuss the functions of group dynamics. Talk about how various individuals fulfill various functions in the group. Identify where you are in the group development process. Set an agenda to discuss these concepts and do a little analysis. Awareness is the first step.

Training. Even though you may believe you do not have time, consider it a waste of time, consider yourself overworked, or have other excuses to neglect training, do not give in. “Learning as you go” is not an option for your employees! Training provides openness: during training, expectations are clarified, skills are built and team members learn to use a variety of the functions mentioned earlier. They receive answers and guidance, and increase their understanding and appreciation for the practice’s goals.

Job descriptions. Each position in the office should have a job description. It explains the responsibilities of the employee and clarifies the expectations of the employer. A job description serves as the outline for training and supports performance evaluations.

Conclusion

What is your style? What functions do you usually perform in a group? Where does your team fit in the development stage right now? Do you have a clear understanding of your goals? Have you achieved a high degree of communications? Are individual’s initiatives and attitudes accepted? Do you have an effective decision making process? What is the balance between the group productivity and individual needs? Are the differing abilities of the group utilized? Is a balance between emotional and rational behavior maintained? If not, revisit the lists or group needs and behaviors, and ask team members to make adjustments.

Bringing our behavior in line with our intentions is both an art and a skill. Go forward, and remember:

Together
Everyone
Accomplishes
More



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Factors Influencing Group Process and Effectiveness

Chart 1

<u>INDIVIDUAL</u>	<u>MAINTENANCE</u>	<u>TASK</u>
<u>Trusting</u> : Revealing oneself, being revealed; believing and confiding in another.	<u>Encouraging</u> : Being friendly, warm and responsive to others; accepting others and their contributions; regarding others by giving them an opportunity or recognition.	<u>Initiation</u> : Proposing tasks or goals; defining a group problem; suggesting a procedure or ideas for solving a problem.
<u>Accepting</u> : Caring; being attentive to and concerned about the opinions, ideas, attitudes and feelings of oneself and others.	<u>Expressing group feelings</u> : Sensing feeling, mood, relationships within the group; sharing feelings or effects with other members.	<u>Information or opinion seeking</u> : Requesting facts; seeking relevant information about a group concern; asking for suggestions and ideas.
<u>Affirming</u> : Praising; appreciating others and their contributions; giving credit for ideas, opinions, and expression of feelings.	<u>Harmonizing</u> : Attempting to reconcile disagreements; reducing tension through “pouring oil on troubled waters”; getting people to explore their differences.	<u>Information or opinion giving</u> : Offering facts; providing relevant information about a group concern; stating a belief; giving suggestions or ideas.
<u>Including</u> : Inviting late comers to join; fill them in on what has happened thus far; elicit another’s position or feelings on the present issue.	<u>Compromising</u> : When own idea or status is involved in a conflict, offering to compromise own position; admitting error, disciplining self to maintain group cohesion.	<u>Clarifying or elaborating</u> : Interpreting or reflecting ideas and suggestions; clearing up confusions; indicating alternatives and issues before the group; giving examples.
<u>Valuing</u> : Upholding the worth and importance of others’ opinions, ideas and attitudes by listening, acknowledging and building on them.	<u>Gate-keeping</u> : Attempting to keep communication channels open; facilitating the participation of others; suggesting procedures for sharing opportunity to discuss group problems; keeping on topic.	<u>Summarizing</u> : Pulling together related ideas; restating suggestions after group has discussed them; offering a decision or conclusion for the group to accept or reject.
<u>Comforting</u> : Healing; giving support and consolation to someone who is grieving, struggling, etc.	<u>Setting standards</u> : Expressing standards for group to achieve; applying standards in evaluating group functions and production.	<u>Consensus tester</u> : Sending up “trial balloons” to see if group is nearing a conclusion; checking with group to see how much agreement has been reached.
<u>Treating equally</u> : Validating and appreciating with fairness by word and action what everyone brings; practicing interdependency.	<u>Energizing</u> : Stimulating individuals to use their particular resources as part of the process of synergy in which the total energy in the group is greater than the sum of its parts.	<u>Assessing resources</u> : Seeing what the group has to work with.

What Is My Style? Group Tasks and Maintenance

Chart 2

TASK				MAINTENANCE			
	What I Do Most Often	What I Do Least Often	What I Should Practice		What I Do Most Often	What I Do Least Often	What I Should Practice
<u>Initiation:</u> Proposing tasks of goals; defining a group problem; suggesting a procedure or ideas for solving a problem.				<u>Encouraging:</u> Being friendly, warm and responsive to others; accepting others and their contributions; regarding others by giving them an opportunity or recognition.			
<u>Information or opinion seeking:</u> Requesting facts; seeking relevant information about a group concern; asking for suggestions and ideas.				<u>Expressing group feelings:</u> Sensing feeling, mood, relationships within the group; sharing own feelings or effects with other members.			
<u>Information or opinion giving:</u> Offering facts; providing relevant information about a group concern; stating a belief; giving suggestions or ideas.				<u>Harmonizing:</u> Attempting to reconcile disagreements; reducing tension through “pouring oil on troubled waters”; getting people to explore their differences.			
<u>Clarifying or elaborating:</u> Interpreting or reflecting ideas and suggestions; clearing up confusions; indicating alternatives and issues before the group; giving examples.				<u>Compromising:</u> When own idea or status is involved in a conflict, offering to compromise own position; admitting error, disciplining self to maintain group cohesion.			
<u>Summarizing:</u> Pulling together related ideas; restating suggestions after group has discussed them; offering a decision or conclusion for the group to accept or reject.				<u>Gate-keeping:</u> Attempting to keep communication channels open; facilitating the participation of others; suggesting procedures for sharing opportunity to discuss group problems.			
<u>Consensus tester:</u> Sending up “trial balloons” to see if group is nearing a conclusion; checking with group to see how much agreement has been reached.				<u>Setting standards:</u> Expressing standards for group to achieve; applying standards in evaluating group functions and production.			
<u>Assessing resources:</u> Seeing what the group has to work with.				<u>Energizing:</u> Stimulating individuals to use their particular resources as part of the process of synergy in which the total energy in the group is greater than the sum of its parts.			

Group Behavior Observation Chart

Chart 3

As you watch a group at work, make a tally mark when you see behaviors which fit into each of these categories. Jot down examples if you'd like.

Behaviors That Advance or Hamper Progress			
<p><u>FIGHT behavior</u>: attacking, being aggressive, ridiculing, and showing negative feelings.</p> <p>Examples:</p>		<p><u>HORSING around</u>: distracting others with inappropriate behavior.</p> <p>Examples:</p>	
<p><u>FLIGHT behavior</u>: avoiding the problem, withdrawing, joking, going off the point, over-intellectualizing.</p> <p>Examples:</p>		<p><u>BLOCKING</u>: disagreeing and opposing anything that is brought up.</p> <p>Examples:</p>	
<p><u>PAIRING behavior</u>: being warm and friendly, intimate, supportive, agreeable. (Watch for opposite of this too – being impersonal, aloof, cold and so on.)</p> <p>Examples:</p>		<p><u>SEEKING recognition</u>: calling attention to one's self, talking to be heard over the voice of others, boasting.</p> <p>Examples:</p>	
<p><u>DEPENDENCY behavior</u>: looking to the leader for support or direction, heavy reliance on structuring and defining of devices and procedures. (Watch for opposites too – rebellion, denial or need for structure.)</p> <p>Examples:</p>		<p><u>DOMINATING</u>: Subordinating or downgrading contributions made by others. Making fun of them.</p> <p>Examples:</p>	
<p><u>WORK behavior</u>: acting on the problems facing the group in a problem-solving way.</p> <p>Examples:</p>		<p><u>PULLING into own shell</u>: Refusing to take active part in discussions or decisions.</p> <p>Examples:</p>	
<p><u>GATE-KEEPING behavior</u>: attempting to keep communications channels open, facilitating the participation of others, suggesting procedures for sharing opportunity to discuss group problems.</p> <p>Examples:</p>		<p><u>MAKING irrelevant comments</u>: injecting thoughts not in keeping with the current topic, holding side conversations, being critical and judgmental of ideas.</p> <p>Examples:</p>	