Many of us have heard a clever adage coined by John Maxwell: “Teamwork makes the dream work.” While you may know this and agree with it, you may not know how to create the team that will make the dream work; still others may not have a clearly communicated or well understood ‘dream’ or vision for the practice.

Having an inspiring and clearly defined vision and mission for the practice is the first step in creating your dream team since they are the foundation for the ‘game’ you want the team to play. No game? No team!

The 50th anniversary of the first steps of man on the moon serves as a great analogy for the power of a dream and mission in creating teams. When President John Kennedy first proclaimed in 1961 that we would land a man on the moon before the end of that decade, there were many naysayers and huge obstacles to accomplishing the mission. At the same time, there were many more people whose personal dreams were ignited by the possibility of being on the team that would make the impossible happen!

The obstacles became challenges to overcome, and each successful ‘overcoming’ fueled the intentions to achieve even more. Many people do not realize that NASA did not accomplish this feat alone; in fact, NASA sought out and contracted ten private companies to work with them.

The vision of dominance in space travel, coupled with the mission to land a man on the moon in less than a decade, fueled imaginations while eliminating ‘old thinking’ and beliefs of what humans could achieve. But to achieve this, they united in purpose. They transformed the idea that different is wrong to different expands possibilities. This historic ‘mission accomplished’ generated countless inventions and advances in technology and has been a model for Maxwell’s adage.

Chances are your vision and mission for the practice are not quite as (excuse the pun) lofty as NASA’s, yet having a vision and a mission is equally important to your success.

Your vision statement is different from your mission statement, and it provides the foundation for the mission.

For many people, their vision actually began to germinate many years, even decades, before they actually entered the work world. Sometimes in a seminar, I ask the audience to raise their hands if they chose to work in orthodontics because of their own orthodontic experience as children, and a significant number of people raise their hands.

This is true for both the doctors and the team members. Also, while the inspiration may not have occurred during childhood, at some point, the possibility of working in a profession that makes a positive difference in the quality of someone’s life is often the reason people enter the orthodontic profession.

This is the start of one’s vision, for either the doctor or the team member. Not everyone shares this desire and that’s neither good nor bad, right nor wrong; but it is important to understand so that when building a team, or when deciding what team to join, you have a clear sense of what to expect.

Your mission or purpose defines how you will implement your vision. For instance, you and I may share a broadly stated vision “to make a positive impact in the quality of life,” and we go about it very differently. You improve people’s smiles, and I seek to make people smile in life. You straighten teeth, while I straighten out communication and relationship issues. You elevate people’s self-esteem by enhancing their outward appearance, while I support people’s self-esteem inwardly. Orthodontic consultants support those who are making a difference; our individual missions differ only in focus (i.e., making practices more

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proficient, efficient, safe, profitable, attractive, etc.).

These distinctions are important in formulating your dream team as well as how you coach and lead them. Not everyone on your team needs to be equally passionate about the dream and for sure, every team member has different talents, personality traits, and ways of expressing themselves. In fact, diversity of talents and characteristics is an important element for a team’s success. Not everyone has the aptitude to be a treatment coordinator, or the dexterity to be a chairside assistant, or the compassionate yet firm approach to be the financial coordinator, or the multi-tasking talents to be a front desk assistant. But we need each of them to succeed and have a well-run practice.

What is essential is having the vision and mission as a common bond and the basis for respect for each person. As famed 11-title-winning basketball coach Phil Jackson said, “The strength of the team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team.”

The following is similar to a recipe for developing the dream team, and like most recipes, the chef’s personal touch allows for variances that suit the individual.

Begin the hiring process by seeking people who share and adhere to your core values. Naturally this requires you to create the list of must-have traits, as well as those that are important but not mandatory. During the interview, use open-ended questions that allow you to decipher these values. For example, if you want to know if the applicant is patient service oriented, ask: “What does great service mean to you? How do you know if the patient is satisfied?” If you want to know if the applicant is a team player, you might ask: “Tell me about a time when work was thrown at you in order to support the team but you weren’t prepared to handle it. What did you do about it?”

If the applicant has passed the interview, then you should test for skills and aptitudes. Wonderlic offers a complement of tests for skills, personality traits, and intelligence at very reasonable rates.

For applicants who seem to be a good fit, the next step is to invite him/her to spend a day at the practice for a skills assessment. (Asking them to come to the office for a working interview can put you at risk as an employer.) In addition to being able to assess the person’s skills, your time will prove invaluable in seeing how s/he relates to the team and to patients.

Of course, you already have a team in place, so the next step is to commit to training everyone on an on-going basis in all aspects of the practice. Training sessions in new developments in software programs, OSHA standards, and clinical skills are obvious must do steps. What may not be as obvious, but is just as essential, is training in patient service, conflict resolution, marketing, and teamship. You may have a highly skilled and talented group of people working in the different areas of the practice, but if they don’t get along, if there is gossip, if they think that marketing is someone else’s job, if they don’t respond well to correction, if they have a poor attitude, your dream team can be a nightmare.

Equally important is the need for meetings on a consistent and regular basis: a morning huddle, weekly team leader/ supervisor meeting, twice monthly team meetings, annual retreat, and annual performance reviews. The basis for all of these is to maintain open communication, but the purpose of each is different.

- **Morning Huddle**—review previous day’s performance (what worked/didn’t work). Review and inform about the day’s schedule and any special attention needs of patients or team members; align on results for the day and energize the group.
- **Weekly Team Leader Meeting**—report with the doctor any special areas of concerns or needs, updates on current projects, and plans for the following week.
- **Twice Monthly Meeting**—review of what worked, what didn’t work, what to build on and what to correct; information on upcoming events, updates on projects and goals for the month/year.
- **Annual Retreat (or ideally semi-annually)** – training and education for enhancing patient relations, teamship, internal and digital marketing, and personal and professional growth.

Having clarity for your what your dream team is and what constitutes your ideal practice is the start of your quest for the ideal practice. As Lao Tzu said, “The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” Happy travels, and make sure you bring your map along!
Joan Garbo is a coach, speaker, and consultant specializing in effective communication skills, team building, and leadership skills. She is a premier change agent who is dedicated to her work and her clients. She will be presenting at the 2020 Users Group Meeting in San Diego.

Contact Info: 631.608.2979 • joangarbo@aol.com