Enhancing teamwork through ‘team play’

By Sherry Blair, CDA

Teams are becoming increasingly important in today’s organizations. Whether they are striving to improve quality, increase efficiency or focus on customer satisfaction, people support what they are involved in.

The focus on employee participation requires a more facilitative, empowering and less directive controlling leadership style. Facilitative leaders learn to use the abilities of their groups to solve problems and make decisions.

What is a team?

I recently read a great definition of a team: A group of people with a high degree of interdependence geared toward the achievement of a goal or the completion of a task.

In other words, members of a team agree on a goal and agree that the only way to achieve the goal is to work together. Some groups have a common goal but do not work together to achieve it.

For example, many teams are really groups because they can work independently to achieve the goal. Some groups work together but do not have a common goal.

What do team members want?

Team members are seeking empowerment. They want to get involved in the way decisions are being made in the workplace. People have rediscovered the advantages of learning through the sharing of experiences and insights. This trend has created a demand for new forms of leadership.

New team techniques are required to involve these team members. Could one of those techniques include team games and activities?

‘Team play’

Let’s look at the definition of an instructional game or activity: A structured process that involves participants interacting with one another to share their experiences and insights.

There are two key elements: experience and interaction. Participants take an active role in jointly experiencing an event, reflecting on it and sharing what they learned from it.

Because teamwork involves participants interacting with one another, it makes sense that they should also learn in situations presented by games and activities.

Science research indicates that people learn more effectively and apply their newly learned knowledge and skills more effectively through games and activities. Research on such diverse areas as stress, anxiety and creativity reinforce the generalization that we need to play more in

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order to improve our learning.

Recent studies on the nature of intelligence have eliminated traditional IQ measures as the sole indicator of effective performance. Newer frameworks of intelligence emphasize that there are several avenues to learning other than the conventional use of language and logic.

Games and activities tap into alternative intelligences. Events that are accompanied by emotions result in long-lasting learning. Games and activities that include appropriate levels of cooperation within teams and competition across teams add emotional elements to learning.

Sample activities
Feedback from these activities can also provide opportunities for practicing interpersonal skills.

Two Truths & A Lie
One of the activities I like when conducting in-office consulting is called Two Truths & A Lie. I use this when working with a team that has been together for a number of years. Each team member will tell two truths and a lie about themselves. The other team members will guess which one is the lie. Because they are trying to stump their teammates, a team member will typically reveal something about themselves that the other team members did not know.

During the activity, keep focused on the goal to prevent the activity from becoming an end in itself. After the activity, there must always be a debriefing discussion. Ask participants to share their insights with one another. Ask them to report on what they learned from the activity, and to develop action plans based on the newly learned principles.

One of the most insightful statements I heard during a debriefing after this activity was the fact that “we may not know our long-term patients as well as we think we do.”

Could there be an emotional “hot button” that we are not finding out about those patients?

Slogans
Another favorite is an activity called Slogans. This activity will give team members an opportunity to reflect on the image of the team. All you do is provide a list of the following slogans to your team and have them identify the companies to which they belong:

1) The Real Thing
2) Drivers Wanted
3) Think Different
4) Find your own road
5) In touch with tomorrow
6) It’s all within your reach
7) Where do you want to go today?

Have them choose the slogan that best represents your team and discuss why.

[And here are the company names: 1) Coca Cola, 2) Volkswagen, 3) Apple, 4) Saab, 5) Toshiba, 6) AT&T, 7) Microsoft.]

Endless possibilities
These are just a couple of activities to get you started. There are, after all, “Endless possibilities!”

The important thing is to remain flexible. Although games and activities have rules, don’t become obsessed with them.

An important requirement for effective teamwork is to maintain your sense of humor and to take serious things playfully. So lighten up and have some fun!

About the author
As director of the Dynamic Team Program at the Las Vegas Institute (LVI), Blair shares her more than 55 years of experience managing each and every system within the dental practice. Her extensive exposure to most forms of practice management and dental systems, as well as her strong focus on patient satisfaction, make her uniquely qualified to enhance the effects of any dental practice. Blair can be contacted by phone at (888) 584-3257 and by e-mail at sblair@teiglobal.com.

Sherry Blair at the IACA Conference Thursday, July 50 1:50–5:30 p.m.

Do You Need A Title to Lead?
How many different definitions of leadership have been interpreted by how many different people?

Bass’ (1989, 1990) theory of leadership states that there are three basic ways to explain how people become leaders. The first two explain the leadership development for a small number of people. These theories are:

1) Some personality traits may lead people naturally into leadership roles. This is the Trait Theory.
2) A crisis or important event may cause a person to rise to the occasion, which brings out extraordinary leadership qualities in an ordinary person. This is the Great Events Theory.
3) People can choose to become leaders. People can learn leadership skills. This is the Transformational Leadership Theory. It is the most widely accepted theory today and the premise on which this presentation is based.

To empower people to take control of their lives in order to make a positive difference.

Identify leadership traits and how to apply them.

Develop principles and skills to influence others.

For more information about the IACA Conference, see pages 104 & 114.