



# How to transform your staff meetings into dynamic business building sessions

By Julie Parker

**S**taff meetings often conjure up feelings of dread, both for the employees and employer. Staff can see them as a waste of time, or worse, a battleground against those who choose this forum as a way of airing grievances. Employers can get frustrated by the constant struggle to have all team members turn up on time and participate with enthusiasm.

Many dental practices misunderstand the purpose of staff meetings. They use the meetings as an opportunity to highlight what team members have done wrong. Everyone shows up just waiting to be beaten down. We all need to be accountable for our behaviours and actions, however a staff meeting is not the stage to finger point and blame. This kind of meeting is totally uninspiring and is damaging to team culture. And it will be these types meetings that result in employers' frustrations, because the staff resist showing up with excitement. That's crazy! Who would choose to show up to be under fire?

Staff meetings, though, can be the most exciting part of a working month! Think about what the effect on team culture would be if your staff meetings strived for the following outcomes:

- foster great team work;
- develop and action processes to achieve goals;
- find solutions to problems;
- empower each individual staff member and their ideas; and
- celebrate successes and acknowledge achievements.

Who wouldn't want to be a part of this? It's very motivating to be involved with the achievement of goals and contributing to the success of a team. And as an

employer, it is your role as the leader to provide an environment that generates this level of motivation.

*So how do you get there?*

## 1. Trust

**T**he establishment of trust is the most important step. Trust in the leader and the process of staff meetings will allow team members to lower their guards and really contribute to staff meetings. Remove all of the reasons they should have reservations, such as:

- listen to every staff member without interruption;
- honour every idea they have by discussing as a group;
- do not criticise anyone's efforts;
- do not embarrass; and
- do not allow bullying.

## 2. Lay down ground rules

**H**old a staff meeting to discuss the parameters of every future meeting. Discuss as a group so everyone gets the opportunity to contribute to the meeting structure. Here is what I recommend to be your "Ground Rules for Team Meetings":

- a. Arrive on time;
- b. No chances for disruptions - put phones on silent, answering machine on, and no patient interruptions;
- c. Agree to stay on topic;
- d. Listen respectfully when others are speaking, without interruption;
- e. Practise open mindedness to diverse input and opinions - all input is valid;
- f. Negative criticism will not be tolerated;
- g. Ask clarifying questions to ensure all conversation is clearly understood;

- h. Encourage all to participate;
- i. Be solutions driven, not problem focused. Agree as a group to focus the discussion on what is constructive towards solutions; and
- j. Have fun and enjoy the time together.

## 3. Be time aware

**C**ommitting to time is part of the trust building. Team members need to see that you mean what you say, so ensure that your 1pm meeting starts at 1pm exactly. If it is to run for 1 hour, then do not go over this timeframe, unless it is unanimously agreed to do so. This reduces the stress for your team members because they can competently plan the rest of their day.

## 4. Use an agenda

**F**ollowing an agenda is of paramount importance. It gives staff members prior opportunity to prepare for the meeting, ensures relevant topics are discussed at the meeting and provides the structure for the meeting to be efficient and impactful.

Post the agenda in the staff room and encourage people to add their points to discuss. Then send out a copy of the agenda a day prior to the meeting to allow people to focus their brilliant thoughts. Stick to this agenda throughout the meeting: this will further establish trust.

Recognise that meetings can easily go over time if you don't methodically move through the agenda. Agenda items need to be listed in terms of importance so that if time runs out, it is the least important items that get deferred. Firmly but respectfully keep everyone on track.

### 5. Limit the agenda

People are motivated by one or two major points, but feel lost when there is a long list of things to accomplish in a time period. Holding meetings monthly allows you to slowly but effectively move through and accomplish success in all areas of the business.

### 6. Prepare minutes

Nominate someone to write notes throughout the meeting to then generate the “minutes”. It is sometimes easier to record the meeting on a phone and then write up the minutes later. Part of the minutes process is to generate a “To Do” list. This list is then handed/mailed to all staff members and also posted in the staff room. Everyone has a month to complete their tasks. A copy of the “To Do” list is to be the first agenda item for the following meeting. It is important to track the team’s progress through the tasks that have been agreed upon. This engenders both accountability, trust and a consistent sense of achievement.

### 7. Celebrate!

Celebrate all achievements - big and small! Start every meeting acknowledging the great work people have done in order to complete their responsibilities in the To Do list. Encourage staff members to highlight specific instances where they felt supported by each other or noticed each other going above and beyond expectation.

Great team meetings are such an important factor in creating a culture that your team members love and that your patients actually feel every single time they walk into your dental practice. It will serve you well to devote the time, energy and effort required to create your own powerful staff meetings.

### About the author

*Julie Parker’s whole career has been devoted to the dental industry, starting in 1987 as a dental nurse. In 2003, Julie became the first non-dentist to buy a dental practice in Australia. She owned and managed her practice in Brighton, Victoria for 10 years. During this time, she more than trebled the turnover and her staff base grew from 3 to 12 members. Julie successfully cultivated a winning team and a winning business. Her business programs on how to accomplish a dream dental business are gleaned from her wealth of experience, intensive education and an inquisitive business mind. Julie is a Certified Practitioner of Neuro-Linguistic Programming, Time Line Therapy and Hypnotherapy.*

*Julie Parker Dental Management offers a subscription based program that educates all dental staff in the building and managing of their practices. Members receive monthly audio CD’s and workbooks that lead them along the path to personal and team success. All team members, including the dentists, receive Certificates of Completion each month for submission for non-clinical CPD points and inclusion on resumes. Memberships are available for \$395 per month. For more info, see [www.julieparkerdentalmanagement.com.au](http://www.julieparkerdentalmanagement.com.au).*