



# Why doesn't my team want to embrace the changes that I think are obviously good?

By Julie Parker

**I** was recently involved in the hiring of an additional dentist for one of my magnificent clients. And not all team members were happy!

Over my years of owning my own practice and coaching other practices, the introduction of new team members is nothing new. And neither, I have noted, is the resistance from individual team members.

I see this happening particularly when a new dentist is joining an established team. The dental assistant(s) who will be working with the new dentist can become concerned at the change and I can appreciate why. The relationship between a dentist and assistant is always close and one in which they are in each other's pockets for 8 hours a day, 4-5 days a week.

If any relationship needs effective and healthy communication, it's this one! A new dentist entering a practice comes in with team members knowing relatively little about his or her character; whether the person is easy to build rapport with; behaviour under pressure; and effectiveness of patient communication skills. Any dental assistant with a few years of experience will know this new partner in the surgery will either be a blessing with enjoyable working days ahead or a challenge that will see the assistant constantly trying to make the best of her days.

And, of course, there are more changes to the working environment than new team members.

Changes such as renovations or relocation of premises, new ownership, adoption of a different management system, changeover of dental software or the introduction of new dental treatments, such as implants or orthodontics.

We are aware that while some people embrace and are excited by changes in the work environment, others feel anxious and resentful. John F. Kennedy was quoted as saying that "about 20% of the people are against any change" and when I reflect on my own experience with dental teams, this figure rings true.

## What are the reasons 20% of people resist change?

- **Loss of control.** Changes can challenge established levels of autonomy team members have achieved in their "territory". This can make them feel lost and unsettled. They may fear they will be "forced" into new systems and lose their sense of control;
- **Uncertainty.** Change in itself is different to what *is*. There will be a period of time that things are uncertain until new routines, behaviours and beliefs are established;
- **Loss face.** If the changes have occurred to replace an old system that no longer works, this challenges the sense of identity of those who played key roles previously. They may become defensive and worry that there will develop a perception of their past performance as ineffective or wrong;

"A new dentist entering a practice comes in with team members knowing relatively little about his or her character... Any dental assistant with a few years of experience will know this new partner in the surgery will either be a blessing with enjoyable working days ahead or a challenge that will see the assistant constantly trying to make the best of her days..."

- **Performance anxiety.** Team members may fear they are not going to be competent with the new system or new team member. Fears of appearing stupid will make people resistant to changes that directly involve them altering their performance;
- **More work.** Change means new systems, changed routines, more thought and modification of established behaviours. This all requires additional effort and energy. If a team member is not excited with change generally or the benefits the change will deliver, they will see this extra effort as too much work;

- **Ripple effect.** We all feed off each other's energy, and team members' responses to change is no different. If a negative vibe develops, it will infect other team members;
- **Lack of reward.** If the benefits of the impending change are not communicated to the team, there is nothing for them to become excited about. Team

“Avoid implementing too many changes at once, as this will confuse and overwhelm your team. If the change is a big one, then roll out the changes in stages. Any familiarity and establishment of new competencies will help your team to feel safe and comfortable...”

engagement in the change occurs when they are shown the bigger, brighter picture that the change can deliver; and

- **Lack of trust.** Team members who doubt the integrity and agenda of their superiors look at change from a defensive mindset. They assume that their needs and concerns will not be acknowledged or seen as important. As a result, they will become distrustful and suspicious of the whole process.

Use this 4-step process to minimise change resistance in your practice, so your team embraces your desired change

**1. Be a great communicator**

Set aside time and energy to conduct as many discussions as your team members need in order to understand what is happening, and what is required of them specifically. “Confusion kills passion”, as JPPS co-founder Charles Kovess says, and “clarity leads to power”.

Provide your team with answers to the following questions:

- Why is there the need for change? Discuss the benefits that your practice will experience and the ramifications of not changing;

- Who will the change involve? Identify which particular team members need to incorporate the changes into their job description;
- How will current processes and behaviours be impacted? Describe to your team exactly how you wish them to behave under the new change; and
- Conduct regular meetings so the whole team can discuss what has been successful to date, identify any barriers that are appearing and generate a sense of progression and overall achievement.

**2. Include everyone in the planning and management of the change**

Allowing your team to provide feedback and input will allow them to better understand what needs to occur for successful change implementation. This will also build trust and minimise fear of the unknown.

**3. Maintain familiarity and a sense of competency**

You want to avoid implementing too many changes at once, as this will confuse and overwhelm your team. If the change is a big one, such as implementing an entirely new practice management system, then roll out the changes in stages. Any familiarity and establishment of new competencies will help your team to feel safe and comfortable to move to the next step.

**4. Provide lots of reassurance along the way**

Continue communication with your team throughout the change implementation. Acknowledge individuals every time you observe them activating the change effectively and coach and encourage them when improvement is needed. DO NOT punish or shame team members when they do not get the new systems right straight away. This will dissuade them from forming new behaviours and they will quickly lose enjoyment and interest in the changes.

Change is a part of everyone's working life. When change is implemented poorly by management, team members can feel confused and unsafe. Creating an envi-

ronment that is empowering, encouraging as well as communicating effectively will not only make the process much less painful but is indeed the only path to successful change implementation, where team members happily embrace the changes that you want them to embrace.

**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.*

“DO NOT punish or shame team members when they do not get the new systems right straight away. This will dissuade them from forming new behaviours and they will quickly lose enjoyment and interest in the changes...”

*Julie Parker Practice Success 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.julieparkerpracticesuccess.com.au](http://www.julieparkerpracticesuccess.com.au).*