



An important step in getting the right people on your bus

By Julie Parker

Have you ever been in a situation that has become so progressively worse that you lose hope that it will ever improve?

In his famous book, *Good to Great*, Jim Collins used the metaphor of a bus and its passengers to emphasise the importance of getting the right team members working in your business.

“You are a bus driver. The bus, your company, is at a standstill and it’s your job to get it going. You have to decide where you’re going, how you’re going to get there and who’s going with you.”

The wrong people on the bus can lead to a great deal of frustration; team members’ attitudes seem off, their performance is weak and team dysfunction has taken hold, like a virus.

You want to avoid this scenario as the repercussions can be destructive.

Normally happy team members become unhappy with the growing problems of the bad team members. Often, the good team members leave for greener pastures while the bad ones hang around for years.

Owners and managers of the practice become weary of the continual problems the bad team members present and have to try hard to maintain effective and positive leadership. The practice productivity and efficiency suffer and it feels like wading through thick mud to achieve any goal. And, worst of all, the standard of care offered to your patients slowly diminishes to a standard that you find concerning.

I frequently have practice owners contact me asking for advice to shift out of this space. Many tell me that, once they have their ideal team, they will then be in a position to implement better systems, improve team culture and design a better patient experience. But, it can’t happen now. Not with this team.

Unfortunately, this approach does not work. And here is why.

Imagine you have a practice that is failing to operate to your expectations and desires. You have been frustrated for months - possibly years - and have developed a clear picture of the practice you want. A key position in your practice opens up and you start the recruitment process. The content of your job advert describes the skills and characteristics of

the person you need for the practice you want to become. During the interviews with the candidates, you describe your vision for the future. The candidate, who has a proven track record and possesses what is needed to help you realise your dream practice, becomes excited at the prospect of joining you in your endeavour to make this wonderful dream a reality. You hire the candidate with great hope and expectation. Your new team member commences working at your practice, filled with excitement and optimism.

Then, “it” happens. “It” being reality.

Despite being assured during the interview process that changes will be made, a plan of action will be developed, there will be immediate progress... nothing is, in fact, happening. This winning candidate sadly realises over the initial days and weeks of “all talk and no action” that optimistic hopes were pinned to the wrong star. And your new improved “pathway” to the future resigns.

How do you manage to attract and keep the right people for your bus? The answer is, design a bus that the right people will be desperate to be on.

Imagine another metaphor.



Someone opining that they cannot find love (like a practice owner opining they can't find good staff).

That partners are all the same and share similar bad characteristics (many practice owners state that "all staff are the same").

After many attempts with different partners, they feel hopeless and fear enduring love is not in their future (practice owners have stated to me "it's hopeless. There are no good candidates for jobs out there").

For such people to attract the right partner, they need to be considerate of the part they play in *every* relationship. Are they helping to create an experience that a partner of their choosing would find appealing? Is their "bus" one that their ideal partner would want to be on?

The same is true for building your ideal team. Finding the right people for your bus is one thing. However, if the right people don't like your bus, they will jump off. That's why designing your bus appropriately is your first best step.

There are two steps in designing your bus.

1. What is your vision?

What does your ideal practice look like, function like and feel like? Project yourself forward 5, 10 years. When you enter the building, what do the physical surroundings look like? How are your team members interacting? What systems do you have in place? What do your patients love about coming to your practice?

2. What environment do the right team members want?

Consider all of the skills and characteristics that your ideal practice team members possess. Consider the types of personality they are and what drives their enthusiasm. Then, research what environment these team members would thrive in. An easy method is to go to dental staff *Facebook* pages and ask the question. Get feedback directly from the horse's mouth. You could also contact current and previous team members for their contribution. Putting a simple search into *Google* will also provide useful information.

Once you have a clear picture of what you want your bus to be, develop a plan to create it. It won't happen overnight. It doesn't need to. With intentional action every day, though, you will get there. And, you will be providing evidence to every current and new team member that this is the path you and the team are on. Tell them clearly: "If it's not for you, jump off the bus and make way for someone who the bus is designed for. If you like how this bus operates, how it makes you feel, then the right seat will be found for you to join the journey to a bright and magnificent future".

The liberation you feel, the reduction in your stress and the sense of progress you experience, will rejuvenate and inspire you.

About the author

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