



ORTHO2

Values-Based Team Building

by **Ken Alexander**

This week I hired two new team members and one of the first things I will have them do is to read our Team Agreements. These 12 values are what we have established for our practice as to how we are going to work together, communicate with each other, and treat each other in a respectful, relationship-building manner.

Establishing a clear team value system is vital if you want to have an effective, enjoyable team.

Here is a brief list of the things we ask every team member to read, and expect that by the end of their trial period they will sign a copy of the agreements which will be placed in their personnel file. It is a very wrong assumption that your team members have been trained with a good work ethic or relationship values, and it is incumbent upon the manager to help the team establish these values that will guide thinking and behavior within the practice. These things are not rocket science, and never have I had a team member say that any one of them should not be applied. Everyone in your orthodontic family wants to know the values of the team, and even more, know that they and others are being held accountable to live out those values while in the practice.

Here are our Team Agreements. I suggest that these not be handed down from management, but that the team gets together and decides what is best for them and the practice.

As part of the Alexander Team I agree:

1. To choose the right attitudes as I graciously treat others with care and respect, even when I disagree, or they disappoint me by making mistakes.
2. To take my problems directly to the person involved and gently help them to see how they can be a stronger team member in helping to build a more cohesive team.
3. To avoid gossip and only talk about negative things to

someone who can help me with the issue or problem.

4. To be gracious in accepting criticism and I promise to make those who come to me with constructive criticism feel good about sharing their suggestions.
5. To generously use the words "I'm sorry." Even if I do not feel I am wrong, I realize that I could be the one who does not see clearly. And even if I am right, I can be gracious enough to allow my team member to "save face."
6. To manage the small conflicts before they become big ones, while also being willing to overlook an offense.
7. To be slow to anger, quick to listen, and gentle in my responses.
8. To be a great team player by trying to do all of my work and 10% of everyone else's work, including the things I do not enjoy doing like sterilization, kitchen duty, and set up and clean up.
9. To do my best to integrate every member on them team into a cohesive group that does not have major cliques and exclusions of certain staff members.
10. To do my best to leave my personal baggage outside the front door each morning where I can pick it up at the end of a wonderful day, if I choose.
11. To choose to be fair not, just get my way, while trying to please others.
12. To make our practice enjoyable by treating others the way I would like to be treated, and by giving praise and appreciation while keeping negativity to a minimum.

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It is an amazing thing that when people understand their responsibilities ahead of time they generally follow through on them. If team members repeatedly fail to live up to the minimum standards of the job, or the established values, then we ask that those who see their failures fulfill Agreement #2 and go directly to the offender to gently remind them of their commitments. If the pattern continues it must be taken to management who will meet with the team members who are breaking the agreed upon values and help them see the unfortunate difference between what they want from others, but is somehow unwilling, or unable, to give to the rest of the team.

If the corrected team member accepts the constructive criticism badly she is reminded of Agreement #4 where she has agreed to be open to constructive criticism. And if she cannot turn her behaviors towards the good values established by the team, she cannot work in our practice.

People are said to be the greatest resource of any business, but is this really true? The wrong people with wrong values will destroy the teamwork and morale of any office, creating great angst and hardship as well as making it hard for the others to enjoy their work. The best way to keep a team focused on hard

work that is enjoyable is to ensure that your team unites on the most important values, especially valuing relationships.

I invite you to join me in helping your team set its own values, and then hold each other accountable with the grace we would want extended to us if we are having a bad day, or exhibiting wrong attitudes or behaviors. Great values create freedom. Freedom to enjoy one's work knowing the expectations, and knowing that those who do not live up to them will be shown how they are missing the mark with their own stated and signed values. ☺

About the Author



Ken Alexander is the Director of Alexander & Sons (formerly Millenium Management Services) for the past 30 years and is one of the most highly respected orthodontic consultants in the world. He is the CEO of a mega-practice and lectures regularly throughout the USA and Europe.