

SUDDEN IMPACT SOLUTIONS
LEADERSHIP / TEAM MANAGEMENT

A GOOD USE OF MEETINGS: PROBLEM SOLVING FOR TEAMS

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We all know that meetings are supposed to be an important way of keeping a practice focused and growing. So how come the number one complaint we hear regarding meetings is that team members find themselves bringing up the same challenges over and over again, with no resolution? The reasons are simple: There's no real focus or plan, there's little or no training on how to have great meetings and therefore the team doesn't have a good grasp on their roles or ideal outcomes expected!

If you don't feel like your meetings accomplish anything, then as a self directed team member you're less likely to want to invest your time to make them work better. Sometimes meetings are put off because they are seen as obstacles to production - if you're busy meeting (and accomplishing no positive change), why wouldn't you prefer to invest your efforts in patient care? So, what's a team to do? If you are going to have more effective meetings that people want to put time and effort in, then the first

step is to learn the skills of REAL problem solving. Successful problem solving is based on being able to accurately identify a specific challenge or practice issue and then draw on the resources available to come up with a viable solution that allows the team to move forward on a plan of action, now.

Problem solving begins with the orthodontist and team diagnosing and gaining agreement on what the problem or issue is. When focusing on problem solving, make sure the team is looking at an issue and not a symptom of the issue. To explain this with a dental example, while examining a new patient you might recognize that adult crowding while problematic, is only a symptom not the complete picture of what that patient truly needs - the "disease". It is the same with problem solving; you have to look deeper to find the root cause of any organizational symptoms. Let's say that you organize a meeting to explore why patients aren't following through with getting the treatment they

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need. Low case acceptance, like adult crowding is the symptom. Fertile discussion can come from exploring the causes – what are we doing to influence and inspire our patients to say yes? Who affects the conversation with the patient and what is the flow of communication from one person to another? What is the financial arrangement process like? How do we follow up? Those are simple “prompts” for discussion of that one problem. Stay focused on the challenge and search for all the contributing reasons before jumping to solutions.

To help create the focus for ideal problem-solving when creating an agenda prior to your meeting, make sure that each listed item is identified as information-oriented or problem-solving-oriented.

To prepare for introducing the issue at the meeting, the initiator of the problem-oriented topic needs to:

- 1) **State The Problem** as specifically as possible. (Extra bonus points, if there are statistical interpretations that point to the issue.)
- 2) **Provide Background Information** (including history, what solutions have been tried, the problem’s current status, and the possible consequences if the problem remains unsolved)
- 3) **Address what parameters** you have for finding a reasonable solution (time, money, people, or policies)
- 4) **Know your desired outcome** – is it one of possibility, opportunity, or action? In the first, possibility, you’ll be generating ideas and maximizing creativity. In the second – you will be exploring options and in the third you will be doing something, now.

When resolving problems becomes less frustrating and more productive, you and your team members will be excited to address issues, because you know there will be resolution. Each step becomes simpler and the outcome becomes more potent with practice. Your team will look forward to meeting, because you get things done and that’s worth any and all effort.



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Dr. Wayne D. Pernell holds a doctorate in clinical psychology. He has been a full-time consultant with Pride Institute for over five years and boasts many very successful clients across the country. Prior to joining Pride, Wayne provided management consultation and executive coaching services for leaders and their teams in companies such as Charles Schwab and Co., Whole Foods Market and AAA. For more information about the Pride Institute, visit www.prideinstitute.com or contact Dr. Pernell directly by phone at (800) 925-2600 or by e-mail at WayneP@PrideInstitute.com.

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