

CREATING THE *(Sigh)* DREAM TEAM

by Jay Geier

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When you hear the words *dream team*, do you envision the U.S. men's basketball 1992 Olympic gold medalists, or the women's soccer 2014 World Cup champions?

With the Olympics next month, we may be hearing the expression even more, in reference to the super-athletes who've earned a

spot to compete in Rio de Janeiro. But would you ever consider your own staff a dream team?

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You're probably thinking: "You can't compare an Olympic dream team to my staff—I mean, come on! These athletes are freakishly talented. My staff ... well, they're great, but not superstars." Maybe so. But any team, whether it's on the basketball court or in the dental office, has the potential to be better—to be *tremendous*, even. The great news is that you, the independent practice owner, have complete control over how dreamy your team becomes.

But it's not easy. In fact, it could be downright painful. But it's totally in your control. The first step is to set the goal of having a great team—to keep it front and center in your mind—and then do what's necessary to create it.

Commit to invest

Your success in building a dream team will reflect the commitment you make to invest in that team. Investing in your team will not only dramatically increase your results and boost practice growth, it also will show the team that you value them personally and professionally.

But before you can leverage that investment, you need to understand some facts.

“If you aren't willing to commit to investing in training your team members and paying them based on their performance, you'll never know how successful your practice can be.”

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The only way you're going to have a great life and a great practice is if you've got a great team. And you won't recognize a bad team until you've had a great one!

Each member of your team has innate capabilities ... and is not living up to them. In building a dream team, you'll want to establish who's willing to develop their real potential and who's not. The best way to identify them and tap into their capabilities is through training and incentives.

Train the team

Much like Olympic athletes, your team needs consistent training to improve their skills. A lot of training options are available, but we recommend quarterly on-site training sessions to help you get

the biggest return on investment. And because new patients are the lifeblood of your practice, training needs to begin with the telephone and your front-desk team.

When you train your team, you provide them with valuable skills that will continue to serve them for the rest of their careers. But training is also a prime opportunity to see who on your team is willing to tap into their innate capabilities and grow—for their own sake, as well as for the practice. Training pushes team members to either accept a new way of working or to resist it, using any kind of excuse not to implement the new skills. Trust me, I've heard them all. *Don't* accept excuses. Your team needs to be tested, through training, to see if they'll succeed.

You don't want people on your payroll who reject growth. Train them first, and if they don't respond in the appropriate amount of time, you have the wrong people in the wrong jobs and you can't keep them there. (More on that later.)



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Incentivize the individual

As mentioned earlier, your team isn't operating at 100 percent. To really get your team motivated to be the best they can be, you need to create a culture that continually connects pay with performance against goals. This approach supercharges the business by continually moving performance goals up, which increases pay (through incentives and bonuses). Talented people enjoy the game, as well as the financial benefit.

Your staff inherently wants to perform well, and who doesn't want to make more money? That's why the most effective way to motivate them to achieve a goal is to offer meaningful dollar incentives. If you don't offer incentives, you send the message that their pay will be the same no matter how much they do—or don't do—for you. This creates a culture in which doing only the minimum is acceptable, and that makes it impossible for a dream team to thrive. (In fact, your best employees will likely get frustrated and leave for better opportunities.)

When you implement personal incentive structures, there will be one of two outcomes:

- Your team members will change their behaviors because they

want something and you'll see that they're capable of more.

- Or your team members are not willing to change or develop their capabilities. And for that, there is no fix.

Since everyone has unique talents and abilities, you need to incentivize on an individual basis. That way, you'll push each person to fulfill her potential and maximize her innate talents.

For example, on top of their base salary, pay your front desk team \$10 for each new patient they personally schedule each month. With the right people in place, you'll see some pretty creative ways to get patients scheduled, even when your office isn't open! It takes more thought, but the result is worth it.

I know what you're thinking: "Susie will be mad if Martha starts making more money than she does." Or: "I can't realistically pay people based on their performance. Yada, yada, yada ..."

I've got news for you: If you aren't willing to commit to investing in training your team members and paying them based on their performance, you'll never know how successful your practice can be. You'll never reap the rewards of a fully empowered, fully motivated dream team. You're being held down—and bullied—by your weak players.





Filter out your weak players

Right now, there are two types of people on your team waiting to show their true colors: power players and weak players. Power players embrace training and growth—they are motivated, respectful and results-oriented. They take pride in their work and strive to improve daily. Create a challenge and they quickly rise to crush it.

Weak players strongly resist new things. They loathe change and resist or react negatively to training, finding excuses for not following proven processes and sometimes lead campaigns for others to follow suit. They think it's "unfair" that they should get paid based on their performance.

Skills can be taught, but attitude is everything. If you have someone in your office with a nasty attitude (think: eye rolls and deep sighs), then you've got to do something about it. Warn this person that negative behavior won't be tolerated any longer; if it continues, *he or she needs to go*.

By ridding your office of weak players, you allow power players to emerge and stretch toward their full potential—which will boost your results across the board.

Now, put a bunch of individuals together who are working at a high level and they'll excel as a team. It will take some time, and they'll never be perfect. But that's OK; the process of building and developing the team is a never-ending one over the life of your practice. Just remember: in order to build and develop a team, you have to start. The change is up to you. ■

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