

How to Make Every Day a Good Day

BY AUBREY GRALAPP



// I love the profession of dentistry. I am passionate about it. And my role in dentistry and in the dental practice has evolved to a place I never imagined. I started my career in dentistry as a dental assistant and, after moving back to my home state of Washington, began working for Dr. Kondo. Over my 14-year tenure with this terrific clinician and human, I moved from assisting to taking the responsibilities and role of practice administrator. I get to work with great people and great patients, many

who have been coming to this practice for more than 40 years. Every day I get the opportunity to change a person's day, a person's smile and maybe even a person's life. Are there bad days where things go wrong? Of course. But my team has made the decision that it's okay to acknowledge when things go a little sideways, saying to each other 'Wow, that was a little bit of a rough one.' We acknowledge it, but we don't allow it to become our focus. //

There are a lot of things that make a day great - the day went smoothly, the schedule had no changes, no patients cancelled last minute, a couple of your favorite patients came in and left appreciating what you did for them and praising the dentistry, the dentist and the team. These great days allow us to go home, be present with our family and fulfilled by what we professionally accomplished that day. We love those days. They are what give us perspective for the days when nothing seems to go right.

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Start YOUR Day on the Right Foot

As a leader, others on the team will look to you and how you react to situations as an indication that they should react in the same way. It's important to start every day prepared. You should be prepared for what's expected and what's not expected. You should also know some things you can control and a lot you just can't. You have no control if Mr. Brown gets in a fender bender on the way to his appointment and is a no-show. But you can control how you respond and react to the unexpected hole in the schedule. You can make it ruin the day and your attitude. Or you can take a breath, look at it as an opportunity to do a little impromptu team training or reach out to patients with incomplete dentistry.

Another way I start my day off on the right foot is by listening to podcasts on my way into work. Not only do I want to learn and expand my skills, but I also want to be encouraged and inspired. There are so many terrific podcasts available that can lift you up during that 30-minute drive and give you a positive foundation for the day like *Nobody Told Me That* by Teresa Duncan.

Shift Your Team's Focus

If you're lucky like me, you work with an amazing team who encourage and support

each other. As the leader, I am constantly looking for cues. We all have personal lives and other responsibilities outside of work. When one of our team seems "off" I know there is always a backstory – tough morning with the kids, water leak or bad traffic. Instead of asking, "What's wrong?" or "Are you alright?" which is usually met with a rushed answer of "Nothing" or "Fine," I try to help them shift the focus from whatever problem they've brought to work to something that can help them reset their day. I may bring up something that recently happened that we laughed about. Or I might ask them about something I know makes them happy, like their pet, boyfriend or baby. I find shifting the focus can make them more open to discussing whatever is affecting their day.

Celebrate the Small Victories

When there's a lot going on (and, honestly, I feel that's all the time), it's often difficult to take a minute as you move from one task to another to celebrate the victories, especially the small ones. Celebrating the small victories – winning that insurance appeal, filling a last minute hole in the schedule and helping a patient get healthy by working together to find a financing solution with the CareCredit credit card – is important because these are what we do every day. That big case should be celebrated, as should be hitting monthly and yearly goals, but it's the small victories that lead to the big wins.

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So, how do you celebrate small victories? It can be so simple. A smile that communicates to a team member “You did good!” or an afternoon latte as a pick me up. I even have a bowl that has \$5 and \$10 gift cards that is pulled out

when it’s time to recognize the team for making it through a particularly tough day. The point is to take the moment to acknowledge what’s going right, because that always minimizes what’s going not so right.



It’s so easy to look at the wrong and let it affect your attitude and the attitude of those around you. That’s why I take a moment every day to be thankful for something that happened at work. Because we have to remind ourselves – and each other – that what we do matters. We do make a difference every day. And knowing that should make every day a good day.



Aubrey Gralapp has been a dental practice administrator for the past 9 years at a well-established and well-loved community family practice in Spokane, Washington. She is an avid learner, constantly seeking new ideas and inspiration from inside and outside dentistry. She is a member as well as a Fellow of the American Association of Dental Office Managers.

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