

The Heart of Commitment: Nurturing Loyalty in Dental Care

by Imtiaz Manji



My most loyal companions

Loyalty is a cornerstone value, signifying unwavering dedication and commitment, whether in our intimate relationships, professional networks, or in the care we provide to our clients and patients. It fosters a profound emotional bond characterized by trust, integrity, reliability, and support. Loyalty liberates us to have open and heartfelt communication that aligns with the best interests of all involved. Loyalty is the silent promise that weathers life's storms, binding us together in the mutual pursuit of a fulfilled and purposeful existence.

Loyalty transcends the notion of a transaction; it's not about a simple give-and-take or maintaining a balance sheet of favors. True loyalty isn't a matter of halves; it's about wholehearted commitment—giving and living 100% without the expectation of something in return. It is the embodiment of our core values, dynamic and forgiving, yet it demands respect and should never be taken lightly. Skills can be acquired, and patronage can be sought, but the heart's loyalty is earned through genuine connection and shared values.

Loyalty is at the heart of every successful practice. Loyal team members contribute at the highest levels, and loyal patients follow through with their commitments and bring others into the practice. A leader's challenge is creating an environment where loyalty permeates every aspect of the practice.

In the following sections, each is ended with questions which, if reflected on with the team and a plan created, can help you with this very important behavior. As you read through and ponder questions about loyalty to oneself, loyalty amongst your team, loyalty with the patient, and loyalty amongst your interprofessional relationships, also think about how the answers to these questions not only impact your practice today but can impact your life moving forward. It is essential to understand that loyalty begins with oneself. My commitment to creating an environment where loyalty is natural means that behavior should consistently reflect this dedication. People respond not just to words but to behavior; thus, if I behave in a way that exemplifies loyalty, it naturally encourages others to do the same. This foundational principle is why we start here, at the core of self-loyalty.

Loyalty Begins with Oneself

At the heart of loyalty lies an inward journey. It's about steadfast dedication to oneself and aspiring to be the best possible version of yourself in every aspect of life. Such commitment paves the way for self-awareness and fosters ongoing personal and professional growth. It ensures we act, and always act authentically, with the highest integrity, and always act in everyone's best interest. It allows us to deliver exceptional care to our patients who depend on us. To fortify this inner loyalty, ponder the following questions:

1. How consistently do I allocate meaningful weekly time for my personal, professional, and clinical development and learning?
2. Have I established clear, actionable goals for the professional growth of the team and I that will enhance our experiences and patient outcomes and am I diligently acting upon these plans?
3. Do I engage with my peers in an interdisciplinary clinical platform with the patient at the center of our focus?
4. In what ways do I ensure accountability for my commitments, both to myself and to others?
5. Am I mindful and reflective, celebrating my achievements while recognizing areas where growth is needed?

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As you ponder these questions, think of two to three actions you can take this week to help improve your loyalty to yourself. This self-commitment is the bedrock for cultivating loyalty in all the other relationships that will drive your practice forward.

Loyalty is a Team Affair

The leader must create an environment where the team feels valued, respected, and invested in. The practice is built on the foundation of shared vision and values, and just as one must be loyal to oneself, each team member must place unwavering faith and trust in one another to excel in their roles. This mutual commitment is evident in the care provided to patients who feel the collective dedication at each visit, fostering a level of trust that transcends location, insurance plans, and fees.

Team members embrace accountability, support each other through challenges, and gauge their success by the positive behaviors of their patients. They see teammates as their professional family and are committed to each other's success and the success of the practice. They are aligned and committed to the tangible goals of the practice within the framework of clinical and value excellence.

As we strive to enhance team loyalty, consider reflecting on the following questions to ensure alignment and commitment within the team:

1. Does each team member come on time and prepared to participate and engage in the team meeting?
2. Does the team have open and honest communication with each other, remain accountable to each other, and deepen trust daily?
3. In what ways do you support each person's professional development and personal growth?
4. How do we celebrate our successes and navigate challenges as a team?
5. What are our strategies for effectively sharing and implementing treatment recommendations, removing any friction to the experience, and maintaining accountability and acceptance?
6. What are our strategies for effectively sharing and implementing treatment-driven recommendations to include our referring doctor and their team, ensuring seamless communication, removing any friction from the experience, and maintaining accountability and acceptance at the referring practice as well?

Loyalty With the Patient

As we strive to enhance patient loyalty, consider reflecting on the following questions to ensure alignment and commitment to the patient:

1. What are the active strategies that truly demonstrate the commitment to clinical excellence of the providers and the team in both the specialist practice and the referring practice?
2. Is the patient experience personalized, and does the team have effective morning meetings to discuss and anticipate the day and each patient's unique needs? How is the relationship with the referring doctor integrated into this?
3. Does the team adapt to the changing day, respond to unexpected circumstances, and remain patient-centric throughout?
4. Does each patient leave the practice with a complete understanding of each visit, including the treatment received, their financial responsibility, and the next steps? This should include their treatment plan and their next appointment.
5. Does the patient leave the practice with a clear understanding of their next visit with the referring practice?
6. Does the patient recommend your practice to their family, friends, and peers? Do they engage in recommending you on social media?
7. Does the patient communicate how incredible your practice is to the referring doctor? If so, how do you know this?

Consistent, reliable quality of care and positive experiences reinforce patient loyalty.

With the answers to these questions in mind, consider the systems that need improvement, the knowledge that should be shared, or the processes that need to be added to maximize loyalty in your patients.

Loyalty with the Interdisciplinary Team

Interdisciplinary care is a key to clinical excellence and is essential in a patient-centric clinical framework. In constructing an interdisciplinary team, several key attributes are fundamental to achieving clinical excellence, especially in the realm of collaborative patient care that fosters an environment of continual learning and growth. These attributes ensure a comprehensive approach to patient care, allowing for a multifaceted treatment perspective that caters to the complex and varied needs of patients.

The first key attribute is effective communication. The essence of an interdisciplinary approach lies in the team's ability to maintain open, clear, and continuous channels of communication. A collaborative approach to decision-making where each member's unique expertise and perspective are valued, leading each member's unique expertise and perspective is valued leads to more informed and holistic treatment decisions. This collaborative mindset also involves the patient as an active participant in their care, ensuring they are well-informed and engaged in their treatment journey.

The second attribute is "transferred loyalty," where the patient transfers their trust and loyalty to the recommended provider based on the trust they have in the referring doctor. This is a very important factor in supporting the patient's value for great care. Patients want to be assured that they are being transferred for collaborative care to "The best specialist for them." This is their specialist, and all the relevant records and information are shared appropriately, and nothing is left to chance in both practices in providing and executing the comprehensive treatment plan.

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Loyalty with the Interdisciplinary Team *(continued)*

Lastly, a commitment to learning is indispensable in such a team setting. This encompasses a dedication to staying abreast of the latest advancements in dental technology and research, participating in ongoing professional development and case studies, and fostering a culture of knowledge sharing within the team. This commitment enhances the team's expertise and ensures that patient care is grounded in the most current and effective practices. This approach is at the heart of the innovation around Spear Study clubs.

To fortify loyalty of the interdisciplinary, ponder the following questions:

1. Are the patients referred back and forth with value to include an effective communications protocol to include a HIPPA-compliant text and email notification between the patient and the interdisciplinary team?
2. Are patients appointed back and forth between the provider practices?
3. Are the patient records, treatment plans, and outcomes mutually shared before, during, and after the completion of the treatment plan?
4. When the patients don't accept treatment, is the decision communicated effectively, and the patients engaged effectively to reconsider their choice with the understanding of the present and future consequences of no treatment?
5. Are you active, regular, and constantly learning together in a small group setting to include case studies?

Think about what roles in your practice influence building a loyal interdisciplinary team and how you can encourage them to do more to grow your loyalty with your whole network.

In summary, loyalty is the guiding thread that weaves through the fabric of our professional ethos, creating a tapestry of trust, excellence, and dedication. It begins with the individual and expands outward, influencing our interactions with colleagues, patients, and the wider community. By nurturing these bonds with intention and integrity, we lay a foundation for a practice that is not only successful but also a beacon of unwavering commitment to the highest standards of dental care and patient satisfaction. By reflecting on the questions at the end of each section, one can better understand the role and importance of loyalty in every aspect of their personal and professional life.

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