

**Ep #3: Collaborative Leadership with  
Joan Unterschuetz**



**Full Episode Transcript**

**With Your Host**

**Allison Watts, DDS**

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## Ep #3: Collaborative Leadership with Joan Unterschuetz

Welcome to *Practicing with the Masters* for dentists with your host, Dr. Allison Watts. Allison believes that there are four pillars for a successful, fulfilling dental practice: clear leadership, sound business principles, well-developed communication skills, and clinical excellence. Allison enjoys helping dentists and teams excel in all of these areas. Each episode she brings you an inspiring conversation with another leading expert. If you desire to learn and grow and in the process take your practice to the next level, then this is the show for you. Now, here's your host, Dr. Allison Watts.

Allison: Welcome to *Practicing with the Masters* podcast. I'm your host, Allison Watts, and I'm dedicated to bringing you masters in the field of dentistry, leadership, and practice management to help you have more fulfillment and success in your practice and life.

I'm excited to have Joan Unterschuetz as my guest today. She is masterful at facilitation and organizational development. Today we'll talk about how we can work collaboratively with our team and our patients to help people grow and make powerful changes in their lives.

I do want to go ahead and introduce Joan. Joan has been in psychology, education, and organizational development for the past thirty years. She has facilitated the successful development of dental teams since the early, I'm thinking, 1980s, is that right, Joan?

Joan: Right. Not the 1080s [laughs].

Allison: Okay. But that's when she envisioned Continuums Consulting. Her mission there is to bring sustainable, positive change and development programs to dental team management. She brings an effective and proven approach to solving challenging issues and inspires dental teams to bring the best of

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themselves to their work and bring wholehearted care to the patients they serve. Joan serves as a visiting faculty at the Pankey Institute for Advanced Dental Education. That's where I first met Joan and I've just been inspired by her ever since.

She has her Leadership and Legacy workshop with Mary once a year in the summer and that's probably one of my favorite things that I go to every year, or I try to go to every year. I know some of you guys have been there because I've seen you there. Then we've done a little bit of coaching together and any chance I get to sit down and talk to Joan I just find it to be a real treat. To me, she's like a, I don't know, Joan, like a spiritual sister and a wise soul that I love learning from, in dentistry and life. So I appreciate you and your wisdom and I'm excited to hear what you have to say tonight and share with everybody.

Joan: Thank you, Allison.

Allison: Yeah, I'm excited for some of these people to get to hear you if they haven't heard you before. It was funny, I sent Joan an email not too long ago. We had a little conversation on Facebook going on about leadership. I asked on Facebook, "What is your biggest leadership challenge?" And Joan and I noticed kind of a common thread. There were many comments and a lot of them had to do with, "How do we be a leader and still be collaborative?"

I know that's one of the things that Joan has talked about, they've been talking about that for years. I don't know what you'd call it, Joan? Teaching it? Talking about it? Learning about it? Altogether, Leadership and Legacy, and your Inspired Facilitation workshops. So that's what we wanted to talk about tonight. I just want to kind of open it up to you, Joan, kind of get

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us started on this conversation about how do we be a leader and also be collaborative?

Joan: Yeah. Well, thank you, Allison, and hello to everybody. This is a little bit interesting to just having people just listen. So I do hope that you'll ask some questions and interject as well. I think that the conversation that I experience that goes on all the time, I believe no matter if you've been working in the ... thinking about leadership for thirty years, or you're brand new to it, is the juxtaposition between the way that we understand what leaders do or what leadership means. The concept of learning to be collaborative, finding a way to be collaborative.

So I think that the way that I'd like to talk about it is if in your mind you can create a little picture or a diagram, or even write it down. On the left-hand side of that diagram is compliance as a model of leadership. Then if you move along a line, from left to right, in the middle of that line you could put cooperation. At the far end of that line you could put collaboration. I think leadership involves all three of those kinds of perspectives. It isn't one or the other.

So for example, I think that compliance, when we think about being a leader, I think we oftentimes use that very narrowly, even today, to think about telling people what to do or getting people to do what we want them to do, and that's how we oftentimes will think about leadership is from that compliance model. I do think that part of leadership has a piece of learning about compliance and how that happens.

But in the last fifty years, I think most of the work around understanding leadership has been looking at, "What are the skills and attitudes and concepts that support cooperation in leadership?" A cooperative model of leadership. I think that

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emerged in the 80s when I first came into consulting. I believe most of the models that we were looking at were really cooperative.

In the last, I would say, twenty years or so, I've been curious about sort of the next developmental step and that is a collaborative learning model. So in a collaborative learning model, I think it's really that part of as people work together, that the decision-making process and the learning process, that people are really learning together. I think when we are in cooperation, for example, that we're sort of side-by-side and we're sharing the learning, and I think about that as two circles sort of side-by-side.

But in a collaborative process, you have an overlapping process. It's in that overlap where I bring something, you bring something, Allison, and we learn together about it and what we come out with is something different and new. It's creative. That's the way I use the word collaborative. I think that we really in leadership, we really need to learn and develop those skills that we need for compliance. We need to learn cooperative. I think the emerging learning, that which is really new and on the edges of our culture, is a collaborative learning model.

Allison: Yeah.

Joan: I think that that collaborative learning model has both an attitude, like I think collaboration is both an attitude—like, I have an attitude of collaboration—but there's also a skillset. I think that there are some very specific skills that we all can learn that help create a collaborative model.

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Caller: So you're trying to kind of spearhead this leadership process, the collaborative, and things like that. How do you deal ... like for me, when I'm trying to work through that, when I get the tension, the push back from people of trying to bring all of those ideas together. When they are so far off the spectrum and people are going in seven different directions, how do you kind of pull it all together? I know that you do this so gracefully and just make everybody comfortable and that they all have a piece of it, but you kind of bring it all together so it becomes cooperative. Does that make sense?

Joan: Yeah, I guess how I think about working with the idea is I think developmentally. So for example, I think that what I really try to help is help people develop the skills that are the supportive skills underneath the ability to create collaborative models. Because I don't think it's a character thing or it's about do you get it or do you not get it, people talk that way.

I really believe that it's really learned. There are some learned skills. Like there's some emotional IQ development that supports collaborative learning. There is some intellectual learning. There's a part of understanding collaboration that I think is about really understanding whole-system design. How do whole systems work?

Caller: Okay.

Joan: So helping people develop that kind of understanding and the tools to understand it. I don't think when I think about supporting people and moving toward collaboration, I think there's a learning process in it and I think that people move along that learning process at their own rate.

Caller: Yeah, that makes sense.

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Joan: If people push back, and I always look for resistance, if somebody pushes back, I always think about, “Oh, there’s an opportunity to help support that person to see it differently.” And their push back is at the place where they are uncomfortable to move forward. So I always welcome push back. I always think that’s a good thing to experience.

Caller: Okay, thanks.

Joan: Does that make sense? Is there more?

Caller: No. Yeah, it does. I think that part of it is you talk about things getting messy, and it’s messy. People are messy. People come from different emotions and feelings and every piece has a place in the conversation and being mindful to allow everyone to express themselves and then pull it together to see what it looks like and not have any predetermined conception of what it should look like, I guess.

Joan: To build off of your kind of idea there, I think of collaboration as a way of rather than managing people, the concept, let’s say thirty years ago is you manage people. Collaboration is much more about making room for everybody. Holding the space for everybody and then being able to pull the threads from that that will move the group forward. That will make the next step, the next creative step.

Because I think that one of the things we get afraid of in collaboration is that it just won’t move, it will just stay in the emotion, or it will just stay in the conversation, and there won’t be movement. I think that the skill we need to develop now, all of us, that’s really on the cutting edge of the culture because people haven’t taught us to do this, we have to learn it, is how

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to make room for everybody and get movement in the group at the same time.

Caller: Yes, that answers it. Thank you.

Joan: Okay, you're welcome.

Allison: Joan, can I ask a question? It's Allison.

Joan: Sure.

Allison: Okay. So my question, Joan, is you're saying there are skills that we need and I kind of just lost my train of thought ... but I think one of the gifts that you have is that pulling the thread and moving people forward. Is it sometimes you're moving them forward and you know what the outcome is? And sometimes you're moving things forward and you don't know what the outcome is? Or do you always not know what the outcome is? Like do you have an outcome, like I want to call it an agenda, but do you know what I mean? Like sometimes you can move someone forward and you're purposefully moving them in a direction?

Joan: Sometimes. I think that sometimes, I guess I wouldn't use that word agenda, but sometimes I have an intuitive guess what would be helpful.

Allison: Okay.

Joan: I actually create an intellectual kind of understanding of what I think will be helpful. And I use the word intuition, but those of you who know me, or if you don't, I also have this strong analytic side. Sometimes I do. But really in collaboration, I may have something that I think is helpful and that we're going to move toward. The difference is I'm not attached to it. I can keep



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the process going and I'm not attached to it. Like, it doesn't have to go that way. The way that I practice working is to be open to the surprise.

Allison: Right, okay.

Joan: So in a collaborative model, what I often say to myself, or coach people to say is, "You may have a guess if you're facilitating or you're leading a group. You might have a guess in the direction that's going to be helpful." You might put out the process to make the stepwise. But really you don't know that until you put that out and sometimes that's helpful and sometimes people will take it in a totally different direction.

Allison: Great. That's great. The outcome, you're saying, if you're open to surprise, the outcome, it's just unlimited. It could be something so much better than what you even imagined.

Joan: Right. Oftentimes when I'm working with a dental team and I'm thinking ... I'm just listening and I keep thinking, "Okay, I'm going to give them two more minutes and if they don't move this along, I'm going to help them move along." Then I take three deep breaths and just give them some room and a little bit of coaching and they come up with an answer that was about twenty times better than the one I had in the back of my mind.

Allison: [Laughs]

Joan: I think that's the best of collaboration because they deepened their own trust in themselves and their thinking and their creativity emerged in a way that I could not have created that answer and it was perfect for that group. Doesn't mean it'd be perfect for another group. That's the part of the collaborative process, is that it comes out of that creative process of people

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who are in the group and therefore the solutions oftentimes elegantly fit that group much more so than a solution from the outside could ever fit.

Allison: Beautiful, thank you.

Joan: You're welcome. I thought I would share some ideas about how do we develop our ability—our, mine and yours, and everybody listening—how do we develop our own skills and talents to create collaboration? I'm curious about this part about what are some of the emotional IQ characteristics that are helpful in a collaborative process?

I think one of the things that is really fundamental to collaboration is being able to work in ambiguity. To be able to tolerate ambiguity for a period of time rather than go to solutions really quickly. As a leader and using the collaborative model, this being able to sort of stay in the, what I think of is that kind of grey area, as a group goes through the developmental process. That's something I think we each have to develop in ourselves, is that ability to stay in ambiguity.

Then the other thing I think that's really helpful and that part to develop in ourselves is the ability to speak the truth, speak our truth, without judgment. I think in our culture that's one of the really strongest, and maybe for me, always has been a piece to keep working on, is how do I hold my voice and speak my truth? Not give my voice up. And yet not go to judgment that it's my idea, or my way is better than anyone else's way, and that idea of being really passionate about what I believe in and yet not attached and not judgmental.

So I think when we talk about, "What's the developmental process? How do we develop those skills?" I think those are the

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two emotional skills and attitudes that are really critical in coming to a collaborative model. I'm wondering if that makes sense to you, Allison, as I say that. Those are the words I use and you may have heard it before, you may not, but ...

Allison: No, it definitely makes sense to me. I was thinking in here somewhere about, and I think it has to do with asking questions, like tolerating ambiguity is an openness. I mean, it includes a lot of things that I was kind of thinking. So I think as a broad category, yeah, that fits very well.

To be willing to ask questions and just, I don't know, I think emotional ... Actually, it just fits everything, because you said, to speak the truth without judgment. So if you're not attached to it, you're not going to get really offended or upset. Yeah, it's beautiful. Very simple and it includes everything, I think.

Joan: So then when we talked the other day, one of the things I was thinking about is that part of developing leadership skills and that is deepening and strengthening our own emotional character. The other one that I thought I would talk about tonight is, from a conceptual point of view, is I think collaboration is an attitude and a process that works really well when you're working in whole systems. That is that the perspective is a whole systems design.

So for example, when I think about the difference between if you think about a team in the old model where you use a triangle. You have the doctor at the top and you have other people below and all the power is at the top of that triangle. That's a sequential model. If you change that and you create intersecting circles, as a model for dentistry for example, and you put the patient in the middle of those intersecting circles,

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that's a whole systems design. It's a way of thinking about it from a whole systems point of view.

People like Wilson Southam and Lynn Carlisle, if Lynn is on, or people that I met in the 80s, they were really thinking about whole systems design at that time. The concept of a patient-centered practice was the first way of really talking about whole system design rather than a linear or a hierarchical design, it really was thinking in whole systems. I think that takes some conscious effort to think about a dental practice as a whole system rather than as a bunch of separate little pieces.

Another way that I sometimes think about a practice or a model, I think visually, and a model is, I think it's more like a mobile and you touch one little part and it affects everything else. So the idea of a whole system is all the pieces are connected. You can't add one little piece somewhere and not affect, whether positively or negatively, but it still impacts. It still has impact on all the other pieces.

So I think collaboration is a process that works really well when you're working with whole systems and complexity. When I think about that ability to think about whole systems, that all things interact with each other. So in dentistry for example, I think one of the things that happens is that sometimes people go to Pankey and they learn something and then they come back and they try to change their practice but they think everything else will stay the same. They'll just change the new patient experience, for example.

Allison: Uh-huh.

Joan: That doesn't work. Again, if you think about it as separate boxes you'll think it will work. But if you recognize that every

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system intersects with every other system, you'll know that if you change a new patient experience, you'll change every system in the practice almost. Maybe not the custodial system but a lot of the systems in the practice will be impacted. So that idea of every system interacts talks about a complex system. I think collaborative learning and collaborative decision making does a better job in those kinds of systems. The collaborative decision-making process is more effective when you're looking at whole system design change.

Allison: Yeah, that makes sense because if you're affecting the whole system, it seems to make sense the whole system would need to have a say and be able to talk about how the thing would impact them. Yeah, it makes total sense.

Jen: Now when you're talking about that, the whole systems thing, for me, because I get it, that is so on the mark. So when I'm working with practices and stuff like that and I'm trying to work through whatever I'm helping them work through, for me, I think of the whole system, that I guess I go back to the Pankey philosophy, know yourself, know your patient, just to have that life balance. I have to kind of put that to my personal life first.

Like, if I just look at my family, they're a whole system. I don't tend to think of it that way, but for me, when I can look at my husband and my three kids it's like we have, I literally have, a pink elephant in our room because when people don't want to talk, I put it on the living room floor and I'm like, "Are we going to keep walking around it or are we going to go right through it?"

Allison: Oh, that's awesome.

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Jen: But it's symbolic and I think maybe that's my way of saying I want to be collaborative. I don't want to be this parent that says, "No, you can't do this, Nick." But I do need to be open to my little kids that are trying... They're people, and they have something to offer, as long as they're not going to hurt themselves. When you feel like somebody is in harm's way or something like that, then I think I tend to panic a little bit even when I work with a dentist, a practice. I need to learn to step back and know that it's not going to be Henny Penny, the world isn't going to fall, and I don't have to solve it.

Joan: I think there are a couple things. When I think of being with children, is that I think there's a developmental model with children that as youngsters grow and change they have more and more ability to make choices for themselves and that by the time they're in their teenage time it doesn't mean you give up all the boundaries, but they're pretty much making decisions for their lives. My goal if I were the queen of the world would be to help youngsters be able to make really good decisions by the time they're sixteen because they can get in ...

Jen: Well, I'm there, Joan [laughs].

Joan: ... More difficulty [laughs].

Jen: I am there.

Joan: But the same thing is true with teens and that is, I do believe that learning to make collaborative decisions and learning to be in this kind of whole system design takes some time and takes learning. It isn't a character thing, like you get it or you don't get it. I think there are some important skills and some important perspectives.

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But, Jen, thanks for saying that about the Pankey Institute because I believe the Pankey Institute is one of the few places that really uses a whole system model of talking about a dental practice. In terms of the places that people go for continuing education now, at least fundamentally, the philosophy had a whole system in perspective. That's why I think collaboration is a model of team development or practice development. That fits that model. It probably doesn't fit ...

Jen: And that's what Dr. Pankey talks about, right. I mean, I can read his book over and over again and I'm like, "Wait a minute, I didn't hear that a year ago when I read the book." But I guess I'm in my own growth and hearing it differently, I tend to want to rush it and I need to be more patient and let it come to me type of thing. But it is true, the Pankey model is a way of life, is a way of doing dentistry, and conducting yourself, I think. For me, that's what it's become.

Joan: And I think there have been other people. I think Bob Barkley understood whole systems. I think Wilson Southam really had a deep understanding about how whole systems work. So I think that there were pioneers that really set this about.

I think that really my work now is refining the understanding and developing the skill base underneath it to help all of us get there. It's one thing to have the concept and the idea but I guess what I encourage us all to think about, and I'd love to hear other people's ideas, about what are the skills and attitudes and intellectual concepts that help people really move toward a collaborative leadership model because I don't think it's done. I really think it's emerging in our culture.

Art: I got a question for you and if you're going to be talking about this later, you can defer to later. You talk about this time where

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it's an asset to stay in ambiguity when we're dealing with the two different laws of ambiguity and the law of clarity. How do you move an organization from the subject matter that started the collaborative effort to some sort of clarity around the path moving forward, once they get into the collaborative mode?

Joan: Well I think that, as the facilitator, my role really has to be to be able to hold both, and at the same time. I have to really be able to hold onto being clear about where we think we're going and to be able to hold on to the ambiguity of the process that gets us there.

Art: Sure.

Joan: One of the things about when I think about collaboration is that it does take the challenge of really being willing to have both of those occurring through the process. I think when we think about clarity, is for me, I think that if I'm the leader of the group and that is I have a pretty clear idea of where I'm hoping we're going to get to something. I don't always know how and the most elegant way and I don't always know the finest outcome, but I think vision has more to do with purpose.

It's so that I'm willing to hang on to what's the purpose of this conversation. But they oftentimes going along the way, we'll learn our way into new ideas. I'm trying to answer the question more from if you're facilitating a group. I would hope that you could practice helping them be very clear about that they want to get somewhere and to help them through the process of how they get there.

Art: Okay, great.



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Joan: I think one of the ways you can help people move through that is to help people answer the question, “Why?” Not just how do we get through this, but why are we doing this? To stay in that conversation about why. What is the purpose of this decision? Or if we’re talking about changing ... I just was with a team and we were really talking about changing the way new patients come into their practice, that’s why it’s sort of top of mind now. It was really helpful to stay in that question about why do we bring new people in in this way? What do we want to have happen? Why do we want to do this? To stay in that long enough so that we begin to understand and as we understand that, new ideas emerge. People’s ideas begin to emerge.

So that’s what I think about holding the clarity and staying in the ambiguity. Otherwise what happens is that I find that small groups will get anxious and then they will go back to doing it the old way or the way somebody else who’s done it, and those ways may be fine.

I just have a bias that if you stay in it long enough, and in the collaborative process, that when you create your own process, you create your own new patient experience, that it is a better fit to your practice. That the system or the decisions that you make, if you can give yourself time to implement them and refine them, that those kind of processes generally are stronger.

But again, I have to go back to say that we’re working with a group of people who’ve also had some practice at collaborative decision making. We’re not working with a group that has been primarily working in a strong compliance model. Does that help, Art? Did I confuse it?

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Art: Nope, I think that's fine. I know from my experience, one of the challenges that we often have is the subject matter or the need to collaborate has usually arisen from some level of collusion in the practice around a specific individual's idea or a specific complication and there's been a case created and typically the byproduct of ambiguity tends to be more collusion. The quicker we can move to clarity by asking ourselves the question is what's working, what's not working. If we consider this like you say, in the new patient experience, we would hope that the byproduct from that level of collaboration would be a high level of clarity around the future.

Joan: Oh, I hear where you're going with that. Yes. I am sort of a little more aligned with what you were asking me. I probably went in a direction that didn't connect as well with your words. Yes, I think that that's accurate and that we're just using the words a little bit differently.

I think when people get scared and you say, "Well, they stay in ambiguity and then there's collusion and sideways conversation and lots of sort of stuff that doesn't work so well." So, yeah, I think that then to be able to get clear, you're using that word much more like, "Let's ask some very clear, honest, open questions." In that clarity of directness that people will be less scared, they'll gain more trust, and they'll be able to be more open to a stronger solution. Is that a better way of saying what you said?

Art: Yeah, I think so. What I'm looking for is, what is the quickest way—and you helped answer part of that—to move an organization, or a team, or even if it's a highly-performing team, from the stalemate of the initial collaboration to active engagement in the solutions. There's a process and I think

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you're starting to get into that with some of the emotional intellect, and the balance, and the way that we problem-solve in our practices or in our businesses. There's got to be some triggers or a catalyst that can move an organization into that mold more quickly than others.

Joan: Yes. I think that what moves people from an emotional point of view ... Let's look at three categories in terms of when people get scared. We've been doing something together and we're high performing but we hit a road block. We're bumping up against something and we can't move through it. When people get scared, they generally will regress to old behavior patterns. So will one of the things that is really fundamental to a collaborative model is somehow to deepen trust. There are a couple of ways, or there are lots of ways, but when people are anxious it helps if you can help people stay present in the current moment and help people trust themselves currently, that they really can manage. We can move through this.

So that really one of the things that I believe that is totally an interesting process, and everybody does it differently, it's just kind of interesting, but however you facilitate or lead a group, when you help the group deepen their trust in themselves and in the process, they will begin to move forward. That will open the group to possibility.

If they keep working in scarcity and get more and more scared then what happens is they'll move more backwards, they'll move more towards what has happened in the past or what's going wrong or they'll just use old solutions to get out of the dilemma. Even high-performing teams will use really old tried-and-true solutions when new and interesting solutions are

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possible if they could just get through that process, they'll go to a much older kind of decision-making process.

Art: Thank you very much.

Allison: Joan, I would enjoy having a quick, well not maybe quick, side conversation, but a little conversation. We have fifteen minutes left just to let you know, Joan, so if you have something you really want to cover. I'm thinking that we could probably have several more calls [laughs]. At this point, I'm thinking, "Oh my goodness, there's a lot of legs, there's a lot of pieces to this."

But that conversation about teaching, helping people deepen their trust in themselves and the process, is that something that would take a really long time to talk about? Can you give us some skills? Do you have some thoughts on what would be good skillsets or tools that we could use to do that? Like when we feel people getting scared, we can feel that they are shutting down, or getting defensive, or whatever.

Joan: And the words that we use are shutdown or go away or ...

Allison: Yeah, they zone out, they totally aren't paying attention, yeah.

Joan: So I think that one of the recognition is, is when that happens is, it's helpful to be able at first to identify that it's happening and speak it out loud. So the way that I do that when I work with a group, without judgment, like, "Oh, you guys are getting scared. Bad you." Much more like, the way that I would recognize it is I would recognize it in myself and I would say, "I'm getting a little anxious and I'm recognizing that other people in the room are also getting a little anxious."

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So that if I can identify it, I then can begin to actually work with the idea of can we be anxious and keep moving along? Can each one of us take a breath and be with our own anxiousness, identify it, and keep moving.

I think about the way I learned really how to do this with teaching people to rappel down rope. And that is people would get halfway down a rope and then get so scared they'd get stuck. To really help people with the process of saying, "Yes, we can be scared and we can keep moving." What will that take? What will it take for each of us to take a breath and to release some of that fear and to move on? So that's one way. There are several techniques that I use but one way is just to identify it.

The other way is to be able to help everybody listen carefully to each other so that we hear each other. Because when people feel understood, even when they're anxious, that deepens trust.

Allison: Right.

Joan: So the action or the process of listening to each other without judgment, being able to listen and hear each other, that skill of listening without judgment and practicing that in a group, when we get anxious, going back and practicing and just listening deeply, that helps everybody in the room deepen their trust of the process and sets the stage to be able to go on to the next challenge. If you blow over that, if you see that in the room and you just blow by it, it's going to come back up again. It won't let you do that.

Allison: Right.

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Joan: When people get scared, it always finds a way to show up. So being willing to talk about that anxiety and to keep the process moving forward. It's not that we're going to do therapy and work through everybody's issues. But can we acknowledge the process of being anxious and keep working? That's what I think of as a collaborative model.

Allison: Thank you. That was beautiful.

Lynn: I have question for you, maybe a couple.

Joan: Oh, good [laughs].

Lynn: [Laughs] When does the therapeutic, collaborative leadership model not work?

Joan: It doesn't work in situations that are very short timeframe. Like you don't have time because collaboration, part of the process of collaboration is, it works well with complexity but it doesn't work well when there's a very simple answer and it's a very short timeframe. It doesn't work.

A collaborative model, I think, is effective when people again have kind of walked through a developmental process both intellectually and emotionally. So that the people in the room have some skills developed and some emotional depths to be able to work in a collaborative model.

So for example, very young groups, or people who come together not in age, because I work with a group of young engineers who are highly collaborative and nobody is thirty yet, I don't think. But when I say young, I mean young in the ability to really listen and speak your own truths without judgment. So if you can listen to other people and you can hold your own

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voice. But if a group has people who can't do that, then collaboration doesn't work.

Collaboration works at scale differently as well. A collaborative model works really well up until about twenty-five people. Then you have to really look at collaboration differently when you get to a scale from over 25 to 150. Then you have to look at it differently when you scale it up again. But from a point of view of collaborative decision-making, smaller groups do better with a collaborative model.

Lynn: From my experience, particularly for dentists leading groups, they come from such a hierarchical model.

Joan: Yes.

Lynn: And I'm talking about this from long personal experience. That the default approach is the old hierarchy model and I really, even after working with this for forty-plus years, I really have to work at reminding myself, as Carl Rogers said, to "trust the process." Particularly for dentists getting started with this, I would say be real easy on yourself because you're overcoming in some cases a lifetime of doing it the other way. I would add one other ...

Joan: I think that's true for all of us. I don't think it's just dentists. I think because I work in dentistry, I see it in dentists. But I don't think it's just in dentists or just in medicine. I do think the default model is, "Do what I say when I say it." Compliance. I think that that's really true for most of us because that's the first developmental step. So when we get, be impatient, or when we get angry or ...

Lynn: Scared or ...

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Joan: Scared, or whatever happens. We'll go there and I don't think it's just dentists and I think we have to give grace to ourselves that this is a learned process. It isn't a character disorder [laughs] or order. It isn't about our character. It's really about learning. It's learning both a concept, the conceptual basis of it, and learning about the process development in it, and learning the emotional IQ development in it. So it's really learned.

Lynn: Thank you, Joanie.

Joan: So you had another question though.

Lynn: Well, it's more of a comment.

Joan: Okay, please.

Lynn: You just referred to it partially. I would quibble about this being a skill. That's part of it and it's really a skill at the start. But as you work with it, it really becomes a way of being and who you are.

The thing that reminds me of that is our friend, Art Combs. I was talking to him about this one time, particularly about the person-centered approach, and he said something that stuck with me for, I don't know, thirty years or something. The conditions of unconditional positive regard, genuineness, and empathy and he said, "Yes, those are really true but if people use that as a skill, it really doesn't work well. What I would hope for is that the person, the helper, is a good person." Over the years, I've come to appreciate that more and more. I know we're right up against the time so I'll just let it be an observation and let Allison wrap this up.

Joan: Well, thank you.



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Lynn: But I wanted to get that in.

Joan: Thank you. For those other people that ... Art was one of the really founders of humanistic psychology and did most of his work in education. Thanks, Lynn, for the comment. Maybe the way that I'd sort of frame that differently is I don't think genuineness or authenticity and empathy can be strategies or techniques.

Lynn: Right.

Joan: I think that they really are those elements that to cultivate or to give space for because I think we all have it. But how much do we believe? I think my challenge has always been to believe deeply in the possibility that those are the elements that make a difference.

Lynn: Yep.

Joan: That my capacity for empathy and authenticity. So thanks.

Lynn: Thank you.

Allison: Yeah, thanks, Lynn.

Joan: So we're right up against the time.

Allison: We are and we had two more people raise their hands so I don't know whether ...

Joan: If we can be fast. Let's see if we can be fast.

Allison: Okay, Mike. Mike Lewis is first, I'm going to unmute you, Mike.

Mike: Yes, one of the things that I've learned to do through a practice like aikido is get up and move next to the person so you can

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see in the same direction. You may not agree, but you're looking in the same direction. Then you can have a conversation. It's not face-to-face, it's next-to-next.

Joan: Thanks, Michael. That's a wonderful strategy. First of all, it's more than a strategy, it really is. It is a model of a life process, to stand side-by-side rather than in each other's face. I love the way that you framed that so that you're looking at the same thing.

Allison: Thank you.

Joan: Thanks.

Allison: Dave, did you still want to say something?

Dave: Well, maybe quickly, I know we're right against the edge of time here. Joan touched on one word that means something and I didn't note it... was in looking at this spectrum from compliance, cooperation, and collaboration, that we've got to give ourselves a little bit of grace to realize that it's a dynamic thing. That we're going to move back and forth in different times and situations and certain times and certain situations, certain places on the spectrum are more appropriate than others. And that we can do that with total forgiveness of ourselves of maybe not getting it exactly right every time.

Joan: Yeah, exactly right, Dave, thanks for the comment. Again, collaboration isn't always exactly the right thing. Sometimes, and many times, it's a great perspective, but I think there are some skills to recognize that the situations, it's one of the ways of coming to a process, but some situations are best served with compliance. Now, not many, but some. And the same with cooperation. So that to give ourselves also the grace that we'll

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be learning what the situation is and then what's the best perspective to come to it from. So, thanks, that's a great reminder.

Allison: Okay, you guys are right, it is almost straight up 8:30 so thank you for minding the time. I appreciate everybody being on here so much and I know Joan does. Everybody is busy and I just enjoy this. This is really neat, like I said, being with a group of like-minded people and thank you, Joan.

Joan: You're welcome. Thanks, Allison. I'm so glad you're doing this and helping us all stretch into new ways of coming together. Thanks to everybody, it's good to hear your voices and all the questions and I hope we'll do it again and there will be more.

Thanks for listening to *Practicing with the Masters* for dentists, with your host, Dr. Allison Watts. For more about how Allison Watts and Transformational Practices can help you create a successful and fulfilling practice and life, visit [transformationalpractices.com](http://transformationalpractices.com).