

Ep #17: Leadership at All Levels with Linda Miles



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Allison Watts, DDS

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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 a more fulfilling and successful practice and life.

So excited to have you and I know you've been in dentistry for a long time. Linda began her career at age seventeen, she was a dental assistant back then. Well, you did receptionist and assisting.

Linda: Right.

Allison: She did that for a dollar an hour in 1961. Then she worked her way up to practice administrator in the mid-70s and when she was doing that, she realized that practice and team development was not something that dentists learned in dental school. So with a \$500.00 loan from a bank in 1978, she started a small consulting and speaking business which became one of the most successful in dentistry over the next three decades.

Linda joined the National Speakers Association in 1981 which was the basis for her success as a professional speaker and she earned the coveted Certified Speaking Professional designation in the early 80s. In 1997, Linda founded the Speaking Consulting Network for mentoring others who wished to start or enhance their own speaking and consulting business.

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Which is where I met you, Linda. After selling, Linda—I know it's LLM&A, but it's Linda Miles & Associates, right?

Linda: That's correct.

Allison: In 2007, she sold that and then she sold SCN and in 2010. She cofounded the Oral Cancer Cause Foundation with Robin Morrison of Florida. She's interested in that because in 2013 she lost her sister-in-law Charlotte and Robin had lost her brother to oral cancer in 2012. So she formed this nonprofit that educates the public, dental practices, and the media on the value of early oral cancer diagnosis.

OCC differs from other oral cancer foundations that provide research funds for oral cancer because it offers financial assistance to the oral cancer patient and their families during medical treatment. Wow, that's really neat, Linda.

Linda: Well, it's so needed.

Allison: Yeah, wow, that's really, I never even knew that. Linda's also authored three books and numerous CDs and audio and DVD productions. Then she's won many designations as a speaker and many awards. She's here to enlighten us about in dentistry how it can be more fun and how we can be more successful when we learn to lead at all levels.

I'm thrilled to have you here. I knew you over the years as more of a management consultant. I just didn't know you had all these other great talents.

Linda: All these other things going.

Allison: Yeah, so I'm so excited to hear.

Linda: Well I'm so happy that you're part of the SCN family and I know we have a lot of other Speaking Consulting Network folks on so we're going to go ahead and get started. Thank you again, Allison, for this invitation.

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Our topic this evening is leadership at all levels. Basically, what that means is that every member of the dental team can be a leader. From the high school helper all the way up to the senior doctor/owner. I wanted to talk about the differences in some practices that the doctor is a born leader, and in other practices where they just seem to never quite connect on how to motivate, how to keep their team members excited about dentistry. So Allison, do you have any questions that you wanted to start off with?

Allison: Yeah, I know when we were talking the other day you had a couple of definitions and you didn't tell them to me. You told me one. But I was kind of curious what you had. One definition that I thought was really neat and then I didn't hear—you didn't tell me what the other one was.

Linda: Right. The first definition would be the Linda Miles definition, and that is leadership to me means the ability to make others feel like a valuable member of the team and to instill pride in their work. That was my mantra for many many years. I was privileged way back in the 90s to have Norman Schwarzkopf as my warmup. I call him my warmup act in Vegas because he was the keynote speaker, the celebrity speaker, and I was speaking following him. We actually used the same microphone. So I say he's my warmup act in Vegas.

He spoke on leadership and it was an awesome meeting. His definition of leadership is the ability to empower others and he said, underline this word, and that is the ability to empower others to willingly do things they would not ordinarily do. To make them feel proud and accomplished.

I loved the word willingly because I think there are two types of employees in dentistry and in any business. There are some that are willing and not able to do the job because of lack of training and lack of encouragement from the leadership. It could

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be the office manager, could be the dentist, it could be coworkers. But some people are willing to do anything and they're just not able because they don't have the skillset or they don't have the training that they needed.

The other employees that we run into in all businesses are those who are able but not willing. Those that have a negative attitude. I know that we've all met those types in our careers. Those who are absolutely able to do it, they're smart, and for some reason they want to row the boat in a different direction than the vision of the practice and the other people on the team.

Norman Schwarzkopf also had several other phrases on leadership that I'd like to share with you. They're great quotes. Number one, "Leaders live in a glass house." He said, "What that means, is that your team, your coworkers, are watching every move that you make." In my seminars I tell dentists, "Write down the six or seven traits, professional and personal traits, that you would like to find in your workers, your employees, your coworkers. Those are supposed to be the traits that you would actually display on a daily basis."

So if you want honest people, if you want hardworking and dedicated and committed and accountable people, guess who has to be the most in all of those traits. It has to be the leader, because they do live in a glass house. Their team members are watching every move that they make. So you can't say these are our traits and these are our qualities we must possess unless the leader possesses them first.

Second quote that Norman Schwarzkopf used is, "Leaders don't have to be liked. They don't have to be liked, and they're not always loved, but they must be respected." Respect is one of those traits that you will never have from other people unless you're giving it out on a daily basis. You don't have to be liked,

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sometimes you're going to have to make a business decision, if you're in upper or middle management, and your coworkers and your team may not like your decision.

I had a call the other day on AskLindaMiles.com, one of the coworkers had an opportunity to take a three-week vacation to Hawaii. Her husband had won some sort of a sales promotion trip. She has a maximum of one week's vacation. The doctor really, really wanted her to be able to enjoy this trip. He knew he would be setting a precedent that if he allowed one to take a three-week vacation at one time, which was not in the patients' best interests, was certainly not in the practice's best interests as a business, and he would be setting a precedent if he said yes.

So he said to this young lady, "If I were making a personal decision, I would say yes. But based on the fact that my decision has to be what's best for my patients, my practice, your coworkers, and this business, I must say no." It was one of the hardest things that a leader has to do, is not always be liked and not always be loved.

But as this coworker said, "I know that this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, I have two choices. I can either resign my position and go, or I can decline the gift and go for one week and return to my job." Basically, those were the only two decisions this person had. Again, if you say yes to one, one of my former bosses used to say, "Linda, you get all of the tires on the car—meaning the team members—you get all the tires rolling in the same direction. They're all pumped up and if you make the wrong business decision as the leader, and you say yes to one person, all of a sudden the air goes out of all the other tires."

So it becomes a morale issue and a guideline that you have to sometimes make business decisions and not personal ones. He

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also said that there are two types of employees. I have said this as well for many, many years, that we have an opportunity to hire givers or we have an opportunity to hire takers. The givers come to work every morning with this one thought on their mind: What can I do for my patients, our patients? What can I do for this practice to make it more successful and less stressful? What can I do for my coworkers to make the day easier and more productive? That is the giver's attitude.

Unfortunately, sometimes no matter how you interview and how you select, you're going to have a person that is a taker. And we've all as consultants and speakers and dentists and team members, we've all worked with those who have—it's a 2 percent, but it's enough if it's in your office to feel like 98 percent. And they come to work every morning with a totally different mindset. "Here I am, I'm absolutely wonderful. I can do it all. That's not my job. And when is my next pay raise?" If the doctor is a giver and the coworkers are all givers and you accidentally have someone like that, it's very hard to lead a person who doesn't want to be effective and be a team member and so forth.

Also a good leader allows room for mistakes. I've had dentists say to me, several times, "Well, at what point will my dental assistant get what I want to be handed next?" And I said to this one doctor, "When you hired this clinical assistant, did you tell her 'I want you to be three steps ahead of me at all times. Even if you hand me the wrong thing, don't wait for me to say, explorer, cotton swab, don't wait for me to guide you.'" I said, "The reason she's waiting is she's scared to death she's going to make a mistake."

My advice to all good leaders is when you hire someone, say I'm hiring you to make some mistakes. If I'm a great trainer, which I'm going to try very hard to be, I don't want those same mistakes repeated. Allow people to make a few mistakes,

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because that's how we all learn. Any other questions that you have along those lines?

Allison: I love what you're saying, because I think, I don't know if this is true. This may be your experience. I've heard this is true, and I am a perfectionist. I think that dentistry tends to attract sort of a perfectionistic personality.

Linda: Let's say if you were not a perfectionist when you went to dental school or hygiene school, you became one while you're there.

Allison: Yeah. We don't really let ourselves make mistakes. I just hired a new person and I think that's a neat conversation to have.

Linda: Good. Just say, "I'm hiring you to make some mistakes because that's how you learn." And always remember as the leader, your employees can't read your mind. They don't know. So outlining your expectations is a great part, or a great trait of a strong leader, because our boss expected a lot from us.

My last boss that was one of these born leaders. He expected a lot, but he gave a lot. But we knew our boundaries and we knew exactly where we stood on various issues. That's because he outlined his expectations, made them very clear to us. He was very supportive, but he expected a lot and he received a lot from his coworkers because we knew exactly what he expected.

Allison: I guess that's really what my question is, is when you're working with doctors and just over the years, what have you learned about being an effective leader? What are the tools, or the things that we can take away from this call and go back and do that you think would...

Linda: Today, you know, they say when the student is ready, the teacher appears. Something came up on LinkedIn this morning that I want to share with the listeners and with you, Allison. It

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was written by Jack and Suzy Welch and this is the Welch Management Institute. Jack Welch is one of the professors at Strayer University. Suzy, his wife is a bestselling author and a TV commentator. They had something, *How to Think Like a Leader*. This just really hit me like a ton of bricks. It fits right in with our topic tonight.

It says, "Being a leader changes everything. Before you're a leader, success is all about you. It's about your performance. Your contributions. It's about raising your hand and getting called on to deliver the right answer. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others. It's about making the people who work for you smarter, bigger, bolder. Nothing you do anymore as an individual matters except how you nurture and support your team and help its members increase their self-confidence."

He also went on to say, "Your success as a leader will come not from what you do, but from what the reflected glory of your team members." It goes on to say, "You spent your entire life, starting in grade school and continuing through your last job, as a contributor who excels in raising your hand. But the good news is that you've been promoted because someone above you believes that you have the stuff to make the leap from a star player to a coach."

"You need to actively mentor your people. Exude positive energy about life and the work you are doing together. Show optimism about the future and care. Care passionately about each person's progress. Give your people feedback. Give them a pat on the back. Not just at year-end and mid-year performance reviews but after meetings and presentations or visits to clients. Make every significant event a teaching moment. Discuss what you like about what they are doing and ways they can improve. Your energy will energize those around you."

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I thought that was very, very profound as far as describing how our mindset changes when we are the worker versus leading the team.

Allison: Yeah. I love that.

Linda: I was just very impressed when I read that. Leaders who are bosses or office administrators must know how employees feel. You must also ask this question, what are the three things that you love most about working here? And what are the three things that are your greatest challenges? Because they love to interact. They love to be asked questions. My last boss was a master at that and 35 years ago when I worked for him, the word leadership was not even a buzzword, much less teaching other people how to be effective leaders. It just was something they had or they didn't have.

I came up with four words that I'd love for everybody to write down if they're taking notes. Leaders also understand the steps of empowerment. I came up with these four steps of empowerment. I think it's so easy when you are leading other people if you follow these in order.

First of all, the word is hire. You must hire well, and that is do effective interviewing and don't just rely on a resume but call the past employers and ask this question, "If you had an opportunity to rehire this applicant, would you do so?" And if they say, "No, and I really would rather not discuss why," you probably need to keep on interviewing. The first word I want you to write down is hire. You have to hire them.

The second word is train them. Training is—I can't even stress the importance. When you see a dynamic team of leaders, you know that they have been so well trained and it's not like they have scripts that they memorize. It's that they know where this practice is going. They have a vision. They know exactly what the leader of this practice, the owner, wants as far as their

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expectations. And they set goals and they monitor and they reward and they communicate effectively.

So the four words I'd like for you to write down: hire, train, trust, and praise. Those are the four key components in my opinion of team empowerment. You cannot trust an employee if they haven't been well-trained. You can't praise me if I'm doing a mediocre job. I can't do a better job if I haven't been trained. So in that particular order: hire, train, trust, and praise. To me, that's such an easy process to bring out the best in other people if you're leading them and to create leaders among you.

One of the greatest examples, I'm only working on one-on-one with one practice at the moment. It took some arm-twisting to get me to say yes I'll come back in. It's a client that I said, "I don't do that anymore. I will refer you." "No, no, no, I really want you to come back in." I just think that it is so easy if you have these four things in order.

This doctor has the most well-trained dental team I've ever worked with. I've watched her bring in young gals who are in their early 20s and some of them have never worked in a dental practice. She has a fabulous practice and does the greatest dentistry. But she brings out that leadership better than anyone I've worked with in 35 years.

I'm watching as I sit in on their team meetings, six months from the hiring date, these young ladies are not just sitting at the team meeting being led by the office manager or the dentist or the consultant. They are actually standing up and taking their turn to facilitate their part of that team meeting. It's just amazing to watch this transformation. But she has the right order. She hires, she trains, she trusts, and she praises. They will jump through hoops til midnight for her. I think that's how it should be.

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Also I want everybody to know that I had a doctor call me once when I was doing my two-day workshops. Rhonda Savage now does those. But when I was doing them from 1985 to 2007, I had a doctor that called me once and said, “I really would like to send my three administrative team members to your two-day workshop in Norfolk, VA, but I have a problem with doing so.”

I said, “Is it the fee? Is it the time off? It’s on a Friday/Saturday.” And he said, “No, here’s my problem. I’m so worried that if I invest in my people, and I send them to your two-day workshop, there’s no doubt they’ll come back very well-trained because I sent another person a few years ago.” But he said, “They’re sort of new to dentistry and I know they’ll come back. Here’s my issue: What if I send all three of them and they come back and go to work for someone else? I have now trained my competition’s team members.”

My response to that doctor, and I hope you’ll remember this response forever, “Doctor, having your team come to Norfolk for this program, having them well-trained, and having them leave is not nearly as expensive as not sending them and having them stay.”

Allison: [Laughter]

Linda: I just couldn’t believe that this doctor was worried about that. It was a first for me to hear that his biggest concern was, “What if I get them trained and I invest in them, and they get really well-trained, and then they go to work for my competition?” I just couldn’t believe it.

One of the things, and Bob Spiel can attest to this, when I started SCN in ’97, I had a few of my, I guess you would call them competitors that had been out in the speaking consulting world in dentistry a long time. They were really kind of upset when they heard what I was doing. They said, “Linda Miles wants to slow down now and she’s going to train the whole

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world to be dental consultants and speakers.” And I smiled and said, “I hope so.”

Because if you have an idea, Allison, and I have an idea, and we exchange ideas, we still have an idea. But if there are 50 of us in a room for three days and each of us has five good ideas, we could come back with 250 ideas.

Allison: True.

Linda: So working with your competitors is really—every time you give to someone you think might be your competition, you absolutely get it back in spades, in my opinion because we learn by teaching.

Allison: I think the more we train our employees, the more likely they are to stay.

Linda: Well, I think so too.

Allison: If they are on board with our philosophy and if they like growing. If you're paying to teach them things they're going to change not only the practice but it changes their lives.

Linda: It certainly does. One of the things that I highly recommend is to attend at least one or two local seminars with your entire team. Then once a year, you should do a large conference like the ADA or the Hinman or the Yankee or the DC meeting or the California meeting, the Chicago mid-winter. All of these major meetings are such an experience. What a reward.

I always tell my audiences this, Allison, and you'll laugh. I say, “For all of you men in this room, I have to share a secret with you. You may already know it if you have a wife, daughters, mothers, sisters, friends who are women, you probably know this but you don't know it as well as I know it. That is that all women have to have something big to look forward to in their life. They get really excited about an event. It could be a

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wedding, it could be the birth of the first child or grandchild, it could be, and when that event is over, we have to start working on—it could be three years from now. But we have to have something exciting to look forward to.”

I used to do a lot of sun-fun cruises and sun-fun seminars in Cancun and Barbados and Bermuda and lots of wonderful places. It was called The Dentist and the Dentist’s Spouse and the Team Appreciation Cruise. We had such fun and we kept the batteries charged.

That’s what creates leaders among you, is to keep always looking for the next step of the practice. How can we better serve these patients? How can we be better at setting the stage for case acceptance by the way we sit chairside and talk to these people? We don’t talk about the weather and our vacation and their vacation. We talk about dentistry.

They’re here for such a small little window of time, why would we not talk about all the wonderful exciting things we’re excited about in dentistry? Like new technology or a course that we took. That’s what creates case acceptance and that’s what creates practice growth along with efficient systems in place and great leadership among you. Also, it’s caused from communication being outstanding.

I think at the basis of everything in practice management and growing a business, growing a practice, is ideal communication. We’ll talk about that a little bit more as we go along but Allison, do you have any other questions that I have not answered?

Allison: I just had a thought when you were talking about the four steps to empowerment. I think my team would say, I think I’ve been pretty good over the years at some of those steps. It just depends on where I was in my practice, but right now, I’ve got some people who have been there a little bit longer now and they’re ready to be trusted more.

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We've actually got a full team, we've been sort of shorthanded and they're fussing at me about not trusting them. I'm not a micromanager, but I think the key is just...

Linda: It's hard for you to let go, yes.

Allison: Yeah.

Linda: That's a trait a lot of business owners have. One of the things I loved most about SCN this year, other than seeing all of our SCN family that came back, and the new ones, was Chuck Blakeman was our keynote speaker. He talked about that, and he says that you absolutely need to have a time in your practice or in your business where you can highly trust someone else to run that business. That if you were to take off for a month, it would run without you. It's on autopilot.

So if they're crying out for more trust and they've had great training, then I think having that conversation with, what we discussed earlier, would help. The other thing is a lot of dentists are very short on praise. They say, "Linda, I don't praise my team in front of my patients or coworkers because they might ask for more money."

I always laugh and say, "Doctor, you have it backwards. Don't you know that if you praise them when they do a great job, number one the patients love to hear us get along well. Also if you're praising the team, then they start praising you, which creates a real exciting office to work in."

The patients love that, they love to see us happy and getting along and praising one another and building each other up instead of "the look" as some dentists call it when they get ticked off at a staff member. The patients, they perceive that body language. You don't have to say a word, they see it, they feel it, it's in the air.

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So when I said to a dentist, “You need to praise them more because when you praise them, they do a better job and then there is more money to share with everybody.” Praise is sometimes not one of the strong, I guess you’d say, leadership traits that some of the dentists have a hard time doing. But I think that it definitely changes the whole atmosphere from tense to professional and fun.

Also I wanted to make a note, leaders don’t have all the answers. They ask for input. They make their team meetings very interactive. I would like to take just a few minutes to talk about team meetings.

When our company was in Inc. 500 back in 1987, in 1988 I went to I think it was Cleveland, OH, and that’s where the award for the 500 small business owners and the Inc. 500 awards was. I had three days to walk around, so I knew that I could buy the tapes they had. What’s the cookie lady? Debbi Fields cookies? She was a speaker. Ken Dychtwald speaking on the aging population and how to market to them. They had some great speakers and I really wanted to hear them but I knew they were taping the sessions.

I knew that I only had three days to walk around and talk to as many of these 500 people or 499 other business owners who were lucky to be in that group that year. So I walked up to them and I had my little clipboard and they thought I was with *Inc.* magazine so they were happy to talk to me. I said, “I want three minutes of your time and I want you to tell me what is the one thing that puts your company on the fast track? I’d like to hear from you individually.” They would think and think and then most of them said something I had never heard in dentistry. That was, “Gee, if I could only pick one thing, I would have to say it’s our in-house training.”

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I was so stunned that I heard it so often, I finally said, “Can you tell me how that works?” “Well, yes, it’s our people training our people. We take time out of our busy week to shut down and have our in-house training. That is, each department talks for thirty minutes about what they do and how they do it. Then everybody is on board.” I thought, gee, I could bring that back to dentistry.

So I started talking in 1989 about the benefit of ex-ing off two hours a week of non-patient time and it’s shocking because most dentists who are analytical are thinking, “Oh my gosh, did Linda Miles say two hours a week? That’s a day a month of lost production.” Because that’s how analyticals think. I have to convince them, especially my clients, that taking this two hours a week of non-patient time and designating a team, a “health of the practice” meeting, the first week of the month. That gives us three and a half weeks to work on our goals for this month.

The first week of the month is called Health of the Practice Statistical Data Team Meeting. And each department in a large practice or each individual in a small practice gives a three minute personal progress report on what they’re responsible for and how they did last month. They keep trying to break their own records. It’s their only chance to shine in front of their coworkers. So when Suzie gives the report, “Last month I made 37 collection calls for past due accounts. Out of those 37 calls I was able to reach 24 people and out of those 24 people, doctor, I’m happy to report our past due accounts are over 90 days dropped 6 percent last month.”

So everybody looks at Suzie and says, “Oh my goodness, that’s great, Suzie. We saw you in the back office and thought you were planning your daughter’s wedding on company time.”

Allison: Updating your status on Facebook.

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Linda: Yes, or on your cell phone. So anyway, every member of the team. So that's called the Health of the Practice Statistical Data. So many dentists are fearful and this comes into that trust factor part of leadership. They're so fearful of saying what our production was last month. What were our write-offs last month? How many new patients did we have? Where did those new patients come from? How many emergencies did we work in? How many of those first-time emergencies are coming back for a comprehensive exam if they were first-time emergencies?

So we need to share numbers. A lot of doctors say, "I liked your whole seminar except that part on I have to tell the team what I produced." I said, "Doctor, they were born at night, not last night. They know what you produced." When we don't discuss it...

We also talk about confidentiality before every team meeting. What is discussed in this room today you become a confidant and the discussion never leaves the walls of this office. This is business. You start your team meetings with remembering that this—because some of the people may forget that we just don't discuss this practice with anyone, or we don't discuss patients outside the practice.

So the first week is Health of the Practice Statistical Data Team Meeting. Week number two and week number four give us four hours a month to work on all of our behind-the-scenes duties. Doctors, what would you do if you had an extra four hours a month? You would probably clear off your desk, read the mail, you would probably make returning phone calls. You'd probably work on treatment planning. You'd probably do a lot of things in that four hours a month.

So week two and week four are your organizational time. When everybody has non-patient time to sharpen instruments, restock their cabinets and their drawers, work on lab cases. Everybody

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should make a list of what they would do if they had four hours a week called non-patient time. They need to put that on the doctor's desk. This is not coffee and donut time, this is roll up our sleeves and do what needs to be done to work on the practice instead of just in the practice.

Then week three is my favorite week of all. That is where we have four half-hour table clinics that are called in-house training. The doctor gives a 30-minute table clinic on clinical dentistry 101. Or a course or a piece of technology that they want. Or they do a hands-on demonstration chairside. The second half-hour is given by the hygiene department. The third is by the administrative team. And the fourth is the clinical assistance.

So everybody gets involved and that's what creates this leadership, this owner mentality versus unionized thinking that I talk about in my seminars. A unionized thinker is a person that says, "Okay, 5:00, time to go home. When is my next raise? That's not my job." They are those taker attitudes that we talked about earlier. We want leaders at all levels and we want those leaders to be owner mentality versus unionized thinkers.

One of the things that Chuck Blakeman explained to me when I had breakfast with him at SCN. He said, "I know what you built, I want to know why you built this." And we started talking about the spirit of SCN and how everybody wants the other people in the room to be highly successful. He said he's working on a project in the Congo to stamp out poverty. I thought, "Wow, couldn't you have picked Texas or Virginia? I mean the Congo, that could be very dangerous."

His point was well taken. He said, "Small businesses that hire zero to twenty people will absolutely stamp out poverty and most of the problems in our own country." He said, "If you give somebody a gift, they say thank you the first time. You give

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somebody a gift the second time, and it's like, 'Oh, again, thank you.' You give them a gift a third time, it's now expected. You give them a gift the fourth time and it's now entitlement." So he believes that if you give people a job, train them to do the job, and let them earn their life, then that's the best way to stamp out all these issues.

As he talked about that, I said, "You know, Chuck Blakeman, I wish I'd have met you twenty years ago," and he said, "Well, I didn't know all this twenty years ago." I said, "If you'll run for president, I'll be your campaign manager." He has a lot of great ideas.

His new book, which is coming out soon, which is really a shocker of a title. His new title of his book is *Why Employees Are Always a Bad Idea*. When I heard that, I thought, "Oh my goodness, employees are not going to want that." But his point is very well taken again because he says, "I don't want employees, I want stakeholders."

He's calling it stakeholders and I'm calling it owner mentality. Same difference. We think we might be brother-sister of another mother, we're not sure. Because our minds work the same, we talk about the same things and we've never met. It was quite an interesting visit with him.

Employees, as I said, are not mind readers. We need clear communication, it's the key to ongoing empowerment. Leaders allow others to lead even though they are the designated leader. I think that that is a key factor in allowing others to lead. That's why this one dentist I talked about has such empowered and leadership at all levels. Even the youngest 22-year-old people I'm just amazed at how they've grown in the few months or the years that I've known them.

Also, your employees and the people that you lead need guidelines and they also need timelines. They also need follow-

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up from upper and middle management. If you hired me, Allison, and you said, "You're going to be my accounts receivable person and you're going to work on clearing up all the money on the books." And you never check back with me.

You see, my boss, I knew what my job was as his office administrator. I was to the check in and the check out and the office manager because it was a very small startup practice. But once a month, he sat down with me and said, "Okay, Miles, let's go over the accounts. I want to know how many phone calls you made and I want to know are there any slow movers that have sent you promises and no payments as requested."

He spent ten minutes with me on my project, but guess what. If he gave me that project and he never asked a question and he never checked back with me to see how I was doing, do you think I would probably burn out and not do it anymore after three weeks? If I'm the only one interested in my result, I'm going to just stop doing it.

Allison: Yeah. Definitely you'd slack off.

Linda: So leaders have to check back with the people they lead. Absolutely. I'm going to leave it to you for any other questions, and then we can open it up to those on the call. I know I talked pretty fast about this, but anything else you can think of Allison?

Allison: Is there, do you think there's a fine line or is it obvious to everybody, the difference between checking back and following up and micromanaging somebody?

Linda: Micromanagers do not have effective followers. Like for instance, if you give someone a task to do and then you jump in and do it for them because you know you can do it faster and better, it absolutely destroys their self-esteem. It absolutely destroys their confidence. They go into a little shell and they just don't try anymore.

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Allison: Yeah. Also, the checking back thing, it's just he gave you time. He wasn't constantly bugging you about it, he wasn't...

Linda: Right. No, once a month we sat down, once a month, and he spent ten minutes with the hygiene department, ten minutes with the clinical assistants, and when he had a new hire, he always at the end of the first week, "Well, how did it go? Is there anything that any of your coworkers here or I can provide for you that would make your next week better than your first week?"

And I always tell people when I hired them in my own company, "You will not like your job for at least twelve weeks because it's going to take you twelve weeks to really feel like you understand what we're about. There's always going to be new zingers every single day like, 'Oops, we forgot to tell her about that.'" The neatest thing is people, usually new people start to like their job in six weeks. So I told them twelve, it was a little white lie, because I knew in six weeks they'd love their job. But I told them it would be twelve weeks before they really felt like they could carry on without asking questions or whatever.

So when they got the hang of it in six weeks, they really felt smart and confident. That hire, train, trust, and praise, in that order is such an important thing.

Allison: Yeah, I love that. It's very simple.

Linda: Very simple.

Allison: Makes it nice. So as far as the communication, I don't really know, that's probably too big of a subject to cover. I mean, how do you feel about, like I told you the story about my friend who said, "Leave it at home, don't talk about emotions at the office..."

Linda: Right, I firmly believe that. I always tell my audiences, "Dig a hole right by the backdoor where we all go in and out every

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day. Dig a hole right by the back door and when you come to work, we all have personal problems. We all have worries about loved ones or pets or finances or whatever. You throw all of your worries in the hole and then when you get to the office you forget those the eight hours that you're there. When you go home, you can dig them up and take them back home with you and the same thing happens. You never, ever go home and whine and moan and groan to your family."

I always said, when my children, when David was four and LaDonna was seven, I went back to work as an endodontic assistant in Miami. We were stationed at Homestead Air Force Base. I squatted down and said to my two little ones, "Now Mommy is going to work in a dental office. I start Monday. I work Monday through Thursday, so if you're going to get sick you must get sick on Thursday night. You must be well by Monday."

And do you know, in eight years of being a mom and a dental auxiliary, I missed two days of work in eight years.

Allison: Wow.

Linda: I was very proud of that. As a professional speaker, that can be real touchy with weather and flights and all of that. I fell and broke my leg on the front steps going to the airport. I fell and broke my arm recently in the hospital. Good place to break your arm. I was on a tile floor and just fell and broke my elbow. I've truly had to call in a backup speaker I think four or five times only in 35 years.

Allison: Wow.

Linda: So I'm very proud of that and I don't believe we should go home—I have friends who actually got divorced because all they did was go home and whine about their job. Your family doesn't deserve that. I always say, the reason my children

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wanted to get jobs in high school is I used to say, “Mommy had the most wonderful day at work today. I love my patients, I love my coworkers, I have the best boss in the whole wide world. I cannot wait for you to grow up so you can go to work too.”

Allison: Wow.

[Laughter]

Linda: Some reverse psychology.

Allison: Oh my goodness, I wish I would have thought of that a long time ago. My kids have heard all the negative stuff.

Linda: So true. It works.

Allison: We can open it up. We have ten minutes left. Do you have anything else you want to for sure say, or...?

Linda: No, I think the questions that come in might spur some more conversation.

Allison: Okay, and I do have a few more questions if nobody wants to join in. Let me unmute everybody. Let's see if it's not too loud, we'll leave it like that.

Okay, you guys are open. Does anybody have a question or comment for Linda?

Steve: I do, or a comment. This is Steve Hart.

Allison: Hi, Steve.

Linda: Hi, Steve.

Steve: Hey, Linda. I think I just heard for the first time a different scenario or verbiage about micromanaging that made more sense to me. I've been accused of being that. But I think I've found a way to be able to tame good leadership or management from sabotaging or really destroying someone's power. So I really wanted to thank you for that.

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Linda: You're welcome.

Steve: That was really good. I am thinking back to times when I know I've done that and in other times where maybe I've been—I mean, I don't know if there's a good micromanager. What do you call a good micromanager? Maybe a good manager?

Linda: A good micromanager is one that can... with the DiSC behavioral profile most dentists are Cs, which are perfectionists off the chart. They do not have stress, Steve. They create stress. I grew up with a C father, so I know, perfectionists. There were four kids. Our house was not always organized and my dad wanted everything in its place. It's a wonder that we're not all OCD.

Steve: Yeah, I've oftentimes heard that I myself don't have stress but I'm a carrier.

[Laughter]

Linda: I love that. I'll have to borrow your phrase. I like that. You're a carrier. I also know this, that you see people, which is the perfectionist, the micromanagers that think they are a little too, less trusting, shall we say. One of the things I can tell you that's going to make you feel really good, is there is no more sensitive person on earth than someone like you. You expect so much of yourself that under stress, you become critical of other people. And you hate that about yourself. You literally hate it. But it's something that was stamped on your forehead in dental school, if not at birth.

But you can improve after hopefully this little chat tonight. You can improve on a daily basis. What I would recommend is go to your team and say, "I have had an epiphany and the epiphany is I truly diminish other people's strengths by some of the things that I say and do that I really don't mean." Most of the women that work in dentistry are born caretakers, caregivers, and

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they're very sensitive. They actually will cry if a micromanager is too much of a manager.

Steve: I've seen that happen.

Linda: Yeah, and sometimes they quit. I had a doctor that was out in New Mexico that actually grabbed the hand of his dental assistant. She had eleven years' experience, she was not a brand-new assistant. He grabbed her hand in front of me. I was standing in the hallway observing. He said, "I told you," with clenched teeth, "I told you to hold the pad here, not there," the mixing pad. She left and I said to him at lunchtime, "You know, doctor, I don't want to hurt your feelings, but I would have a difficult time working for you too."

Later I saw him at a dental meeting. He was 47 and still a bachelor, and his behavior was probably worse out of the office than in the office. He saw me ten years later at the ADA and told me that what I did for him was beyond practice management. He now is engaged, and he now has redeveloped a different relationship with his females, all the females in his life. So that was good.

Steve: That was good and that really opened my eyes what you said, because I just got it. It was an aha moment. So thank you very much.

Linda: It was an aha—you're so welcome. It's so good to have you on here, Steve.

Allison: Does anybody else have a question?

Jill: I don't have a question, but it's Jill. I do have a comment because I'm the same. Thank you, Linda, so much, I appreciate all your comments because I have a dentist that has just asked me to come in and talk to the staff because he's 65. He's keen to work another five years, he says, he loves dentistry so much. But his team are burnt out and he wants me to come in and talk

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to them to re-energize them and I think you gave me some great ideas there.

Linda: Wonderful news, I'm so glad.

Jill: They've been in dentistry a long time and they're burnt out and he's energized to keep going.

Linda: That was exactly the last assignment I was called in to do was to get the smile back on the team members' faces, because they were burned out. I said, "You've got to understand what is important to the women in your office." One of the things that was a real clincher was they'd had some deaths in the families of the team. They had some illnesses, serious illnesses, and they were sad. So getting the smile back on their face is not always easy unless you know what is it that's important to that person outside the office and inside the office.

You try to meet their needs and be encouraging. One of the older dentists told me once that he was totally burned out, and I said, "Doctor, in listening to you, how could you be burned out, you've never been on fire yet?" And that was so true because he hated dentistry, he hated going to his office. I thought, just sell the practice, let somebody else have it because I would not have wanted to work for him.

Jill: Oh goodness, well thank you very much, I appreciate all you've said.

Linda: You're welcome.

Allison: Anybody else? We have a few more minutes.

Roy: Hi, Linda, this is Roy Shelburne. I have a question. You're the consummate leader and I was wondering if you might be able to share your greatest leadership challenge and how you handled it.

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Linda: Wow, that's a good question, Roy. I think that my greatest leadership challenge was that I was always on the road and I didn't spend enough time with my own team in the corporate office. So not being present, being an absentee owner, was my biggest leadership challenge.

But thank goodness, Lee Tarvin, we will celebrate our 30th anniversary in February of working together since '84. She was a fabulous leader, still is. We don't have a team anymore, just the two of us work from our homes. But I think that being away and trying to be part of the team only on Monday was my biggest challenge.

Allison: Do you have more, Roy?

Roy: No, I was just thinking, as a dentist, a lot of times if we're not engaged, we're absentee owners as well.

Linda: Oh, that's a new seminar Roy, right that down. That is fabulous what you just said. You can be there daily and still be an absentee leader.

Roy: You can. What you just said rings so true. You can be there and not be engaged, or ignore, or just hope it will go away and in that respect you're very much absent. What you shared in terms of being able to realize that and to implement and certainly to train and have them able to be on automatic pilot. But of course you have to be engaged enough to train them to begin with.

Linda: You have to check back with them. How's your project going? If the leader isn't engaged, as you said, in the result, the result will go away. It's like dentists ask me all the time, "You know, Linda, we'll go to a seminar, we'll get all fired up, we'll do it for three or four weeks, and then the first thing I know they're not doing it anymore." I'll say, "How often did you check back to see? How excited were you about their process?" "Well, I just

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gave them the job, they should know how to do it.” You know? It doesn’t work that way.

Allison: Yeah. And I think that’s a test sometimes in practice, to do that.

Linda: You get busy. I tell my audiences, “If you think you have a hard job, you ought to be a dentist. Not only do they take care of their patients and their clinical needs... If a surgeon makes a mistake, the patient’s asleep, they don’t know it. But if a dentist makes a mistake, so they’re constantly having to take care of the patient, then they have a business to run, which they weren’t taught in dental school how to do so. Then they hire and they become an employer and they’ve got to keep everybody’s battery charged. It’s a tough, tough job.

Allison: Yeah, definitely. I have appreciated everything tonight, Linda. It was wonderful to hear. You had a lot of pearls in here tonight, so I’m going to probably listen to this again and let some of it sink in.

Linda: That’s great, and it has been recorded, right, Allison?

Allison: Yes, and everybody that’s on will get the recording. If you signed up you’ll get the recording.

Linda: It might even be a good idea to share it with their whole team, if they’re...

Allison: Oh yeah, absolutely.

Linda: Thank you so much for being on. And Allison, thank you so much for the invitation.

Allison: Absolutely, it was a joy to have you. I really did learn a lot, and I know everybody on the call did and I am going to share this with my team.

Linda: Good, good. Then you’re going to say, “We have a new leader, and it’s me!”

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Allison: Yeah. Absolutely. We've been reading a John Maxwell book as a team. We have a meeting every other week and we had our meeting today and we were kind of just going, "Man, we read this book, but we're not really implementing it." So it's funny we're talking about all those things again tonight.

Linda: Well, that's good.

Allison: We do work on it.

Linda: And John Maxwell is one of my favorite, favorite authors. He's great.

Caller: I just also wanted to say thank you to Allison. I've been a part of three or four of these great phone calls and what a great contribution to dentistry you're making, Allison, just having these wonderful people to help us. So thank you very much.

Allison: Thanks.

Linda: And Allison is such a great moderator. She makes everybody on the call feel welcome. It's like a chat. We're just sitting in someone's living room having a conversation.

Allison: Thanks.

Caller: It was great.

Allison: Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you all for showing up. It wouldn't be very much fun if I didn't have anybody else on here. It would just be me and Linda talking. It is like we're talking but it is fun to have you guys and I really enjoy and appreciate the interaction and the questions and the comments.

Linda: Everybody have a great, great evening, and a great weekend coming up.

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