

# Ep #65: Effective Leadership and Problem Solving with Andrea Clasen



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Allison Watts, DDS

[Practicing with the Masters](#) with Allison Watts, DDS

# Ep #65: Effective Leadership and Problem Solving with Andrea Clasen

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: All right, I'm going to go ahead and officially introduce you, Andrea, and then we'll get started. Andrea Clasen helps dentists and dental specialists grow their practices with intention. She specializes in operation and organizational development, bringing more than 35 years of practice management expertise, and 14 years of chairside and practice administration experience to her role. Some professional points of distinction include certified five star service, Ritz Carlton Leadership Center, founder of the South Coast Academy of Dentistry, founder of the Newport Coast Leadership Forum. She's been published in Dental Business Today and the CDA Journal. Andrea has been faculty at USC, Herman Ostrow School of Dentistry. A gifted speaker, Andrea is often invited to address dental audiences at continuing education symposiums and academies throughout North America.

I am super excited to have you here Andrea. I have known you for a long time. You have been, and were, such a blessing to me early in my career. Thankfully I found out about you from another dentist. You were my first consultant. I have always loved you and I'm just thrilled to have you here. I'm super excited about our topic.

[Practicing with the Masters](#) with Allison Watts, DDS

# Ep #65: Effective Leadership and Problem Solving with Andrea Clasen

Andrea: Thank you Allison.

Allison: Yeah, so I want you to start a couple of things. I wanted you to start off tonight by telling us why you're so passionate about this subject of leadership and after that we can jump into sort of what you see as the challenges and the issues that you see pretty commonly in dental practices.

Andrea: I would be happy to. I first just want to say what I said to you a little earlier, that I'm so honored to join the list of speakers that you've had on your podcast. I reviewed the names and many of them go back in my history, I learned so much from them. I'm just honored to join the list. It's wonderful this year how my career started, because that is really where the passion began. I was a teenager coming out of high school, and I was a young single mother struggling, and I needed a job. I wasn't able to choose just anything, I took a job that was available, and it happened to be in a dental practice. Fortunately, I went to work for someone who was one of the first people that changed my life.

As I went into this practice as a young teenage mother, who was quite self focused, I think I felt a little sorry for myself, and maybe was a little self centered. The doctor I worked for made it very clear in his very kind way that the practice hours, and the time I was there to assist and help him was not about me. It was about the patient. That we were there to care for people who were in need, who were frightened, who were possibly going through a surgical procedure, or something even simple, but they were afraid. We were there to give them our attention and care. It was the very first turning point for me, where I had to make a choice. I had to realize that this was I could either leave and get indignant, or I was going to grow up a little bit, and realize that this was going to now give me purpose.

[Practicing with the Masters](#) with Allison Watts, DDS

# Ep #65: Effective Leadership and Problem Solving with Andrea Clasen

That actually was the greatest gift, because now this purpose I received, with now a career starting in dentistry, took me away from my troubles, so to speak. I no longer focused on my issues and my worries. They were still there and I had to deal with them, but from eight to five I was able to step away from that, and didn't even begin to realize what this would mean for me. It started what now is 51 years in dentistry. I'm just forever thankful and I never will forget those early years, and the people that I worked for, for 14 years that were very instrumental in my doing what I do today.

Allison: I love that, that's beautiful.

Andrea: It's a little mushy maybe, but I still feel very, very sensitive to what I do. I care deeply about not only the dentist who is a client, but I relate quite well still today to the employees in an office, and some of the challenges they have. I think it gives me an advantage to help both sides, because my goal is to bring them all into alignment, and have each side see the others point of view, so they can work together as a team. Because oftentimes the employees in a dental office come from a very different place than a dentist.

Allison: Yeah, I think you do a beautiful job of that.

Andrea: Thank you.

Allison: You do a beautiful job of aligning the two sides. Actually, I can really see clearly our topic tonight and how it relates to your story, actually, that's pretty cool. Because you had a really amazing role model of what you're going to talk about and then you also were the employee so you got to see it from the other side.

# Ep #65: Effective Leadership and Problem Solving with Andrea Clasen

Yeah, so will you start us off by ... I know you've been in dentistry a long time and know you've seen these challenges that dentists have. Well obviously, you see the problem from both sides, but I'd love for you to share a little bit about what you see as the challenges and then we'll start talking about the solutions.

Andrea: Well I'll wait for you, is I wanted to sort of frame this so that the listeners might take away some thoughts, and even whether there are tools they could use, or reflect on, but I wanted to try to keep it in some sort of order. I know what I mean to say, but I want to have it organized enough so that it's got some sense and sensibility to it. I wanted to talk about the five star practice, what that means, and the leadership element, and then the conflict resolution, or dealing with confrontation, which is what it takes sometimes to keep it in place. I wanted to go through a little bit of the history of how this occurred for me to take you into that five star practice as I would define it.

Allison: Perfect.

Andrea: How does ...

Allison: That sounds great.

Andrea: The first part here has to do with conflict resolution, confrontation, problem solving, and that area of communication that I rely on a great deal. About 25 years ago I was introduced to leadership effectiveness training, or LET, through the Pride Institute. I worked with the Pride Institute for four years when I started consulting. They brought us in to a full week workshop and I had my first glimpse into how to deal with conflict, and how to confront someone in a positive way, and it changed my life completely. Because everything I view, from my belief

# Ep #65: Effective Leadership and Problem Solving with Andrea Clasen

system, was the opposite of what I was learning. It was a real jolt and both professionally, and personally, I was turned around very quickly. It started me on the path to continue to learn more about that topic until today. I still am studying that, because it seems like it's endless. I acquired my first skills with leadership effectiveness training then.

Then about ... That was about 25 years ago, and then about 20 years ago, now I've been consulting about 15 years. I had an opportunity to stay at the Ritz Carlton once a month for four years, because I was speaking at a dental program, and that is where I stayed. They had me stay one night at the Ritz Carlton, so that was lovely. What I realized over these four years was I was picking up on their service, and their consistency, and how everyone from the housekeeper to the parking valet, everyone knew my name. They remembered me from one visit to the next. All the special amenities were always in place. It was just better each visit. I was just more and more intrigued by this experience while I was speaking at another dental conference, I think on insurance or something.

I contacted the Ritz Carlton, this was in the 90s. I asked about a leadership program, or something they might have, where I could learn what was behind the curtain, so to speak. Because I was a little cynical. I was thinking, "How do they make them do this? How do they make their employees ... How do they make them say, 'Certainly?' How do they never refuse a request?" I mean, do they give them bonuses. I mean I was just befuddled. The longer it went, the more I was sure there was some trick to this, they threaten maybe, I don't know. Fortunately, at that time they had a week long course, and I was able to move into the Ritz Carlton for a solid week, and move through everything they did. I learned the secret, if you will. That was the second part of in my journey. I never put together my conflict resolution

[Practicing with the Masters](#) with Allison Watts, DDS

# Ep #65: Effective Leadership and Problem Solving with Andrea Clasen

training, and the Ritz Carlton, and this five star service. I didn't put those together at all. It was as I went on to teach some of this I realized how there was an overlap, which I'll get to.

Let me tell you first a little bit about the Ritz Carlton. I signed up for the course and there 14 business leaders there in a horseshoe shaped table in a conference room. No one was from dentistry. They were from large corporations and they were HR people. As we sat there for the first morning of the first day the general manager of the hotel walked in. He was the first person to speak. He stood in front of us, he welcomed us to the meeting, and he said, "Welcome to the Ritz Carlton, I'd like to introduce that we have our ladies and gentlemen here, that work here, and we serve ladies and gentlemen, and have 400 people on property working at this time, and we anticipate we could have 400 problems, or 400 things go wrong." He really had my attention. He said, "You know, our goal is not that we never have a mistake, or a problem, our goal is to teach and coach our employees to think fast when a problem occurs, so they resolve it as fast as possible. Because if we don't take the guest from hot to cold very quickly, we risk losing their loyalty." I don't know if you have a question at this point Allison.

Allison: No, I think that's amazing. That's really ...

Andrea: I keep talking, so I want to make sure I pause for a question.

I was all ready now. Within a few moments he had my attention. I think just saying, "We are ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen, and we have problems here, but our goal is to teach people what to do when they occur, and not to have ... they don't have to go to a manager to get permission. We don't have a meeting over the issue, they are to take action immediately, so much so that each employee has a budget of

# Ep #65: Effective Leadership and Problem Solving with Andrea Clasen

\$2,000 each to fix any complaint when it occurs." Without any questions asked.

If a guest is unhappy with the shirt, the way it was pressed, the employee may get into their ... They leave the hotel, get in their car, drive to a department store, purchase a new shirt, come back, present it to the guest, and resolve the problem. They will then be reimbursed for the dollars they spent, but more so, they are going to be acknowledged in the hotel the next morning, and every single morning lineup, which is like a morning huddle in a dental office. The name of that employee will be announced and their outstanding effort for the guest will be acknowledged. It will even go in an email out to all Ritz Carlton's worldwide and that employee's name will be announced.

Allison: Wow.

Andrea: They don't mess around. We talk about recognition and creating a culture where people are ... Not only is it acceptable but it is celebrated, it is to keep that going, have others hear it, know it, and others jump on board, and continue to do that, because their goal is to create a loyalty with the guest. Their first line of attack, as you may have heard me say, "Ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen," management, their goal, is to honor the employees, treat employees exactly as they treat a guest, because they believe that if they create loyalty with the employee from the management standpoint, the employee will be reciprocal, and then treat the guest with that same courtesy. They focus on the employee so the employee will then focus on the guest and return the favor, if you will.

When I was working with a dental office prior to this course, I would be in meetings talking about how we as a team could

[Practicing with the Masters](#) with Allison Watts, DDS



# Ep #65: Effective Leadership and Problem Solving with Andrea Clasen

service and take care of the patient. How will we step above to give extraordinary care to our patient? What can we do for them? How will we make care calls at the end of the day? Will we have a gift for referrals? And so on. The piece that I was missing was focusing on the coaching of the dentist to make sure they first focused on the employee. Then that piece was in order and then we could incorporate what we would be doing for the patient. Does that make sense?

Allison: Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah. That's interesting. I think a lot of us think we're all focusing on the patient.

Andrea: Yes, and that was the big aha for me, was that their work is directly to the employee. You know, I can remember way back when I was teenager, and assisting, and the way this dentist I worked for treated me. He had very high standards and he was very critical, or very precise, about how everything had be from cleanliness, to the chart, he was very adamant about how things must run, but he was very kind. He was a very good listener. I could tell he cared about me. I always sang his praises. I didn't realize what was happening at the time, but I believe that's what was occurring for me. Because he treated me with such respect, and such support, and kindness, I couldn't help but then speak kindly of him.

When questioned by a patient with, "Why this might cost a certain amount, or do I really need this treatment?" I was anxious to answer the question, I because I knew he had their best interest at heart, because he had my best interest at heart. I didn't even need verbal skills in those days, I just spoke from my heart, because believed in him. I believe that's what the Ritz Carlton, Starbucks, Four Seasons, Zappos, Southwest Airlines, and I could go on, as I continue to investigate this, it is what these companies all do. They focus on the employee and so

# Ep #65: Effective Leadership and Problem Solving with Andrea Clasen

the employee will then turn, be supportive of who they are, and speak well in their behalf. This was a huge eye opener for me and I went to work a little different as a consultant in what I asked of the dentist.

An example could be the priority we give staff in having their dental care, or their hygiene visit. In some offices they may wait until there's a cancellation. If the office is very busy an assistant might be a month or two overdue to have their hygiene visit, right?

Allison: Right.

Andrea: I've encouraged doctors to say make sure on their due day, you put the employee's name in the schedule, and you see them on time, because that further emphasizes why we should see patients on time. One of the things they do at the Ritz Carlton is when they go through training, all employees, whether they're a dish washer, a housekeeper, or catering manager, they will all spend the night in the Ritz Carlton. They will experience what it is like to stay in a five star hotel and they will have a feeling of what the experience is like for the guest, because they'll be asked to duplicate that. By in turn, I ask dentists to make sure that when they have a new employee that they make sure that they ask if they can have them go through a comprehensive exam, and experience what a first visit is like firsthand, so that they can describe that better to the patient.

Any questions so far?

Allison: Let me remind everybody, because we've had a few people jump on since we started. If anybody has a question, you can push star two.

Andrea: The next area that ...

[Practicing with the Masters](#) with Allison Watts, DDS

# Ep #65: Effective Leadership and Problem Solving with Andrea Clasen

Allison: Yeah, go ahead Andrea.

Andrea: This creating this loyalty with the employee and their first target, it just takes on so many things. It can be where a dentist keeps the promise of having a performance review verses saying they'll have a review and then forget about it. It's the promise of talking about a raise at a time that is expected by the employee on an anniversary date of their employment, even if a raise isn't given, that that is honored, and that time is taken for them. It just branches out to many, many things that I've found not at all by intention. One of the challenges you all have is that you're doing dentistry, you're the CEO of your business, you're the HR manager, most of you, and you're juggling three or six heads. If these things slip, I know it isn't by intention, but if I'm able to with an individual practice, assist that doctor in creating some schedule, some type of organization where they can remember these things, it will pay off. It is a return on investment for sure. I've seen that happen quite readily.

My biggest challenge is often just discovering if the doctor I'm working with can acquire this belief in that the employee is equal to the patient in what they deserve and how they'll be treated. They're not second line, they're going to be the first line. That's the first discussion that takes place. To sort of sort that out. This takes place, if I'm receiving a call from a dentist, and they say, "I really want to ... I want to kick my practice to the next level. I want to deliver five star service, but I want to take it up a little bit more than where I am." That is when I then investigate all of this.

The next step is very important. Is to hire people that fit this concept. In other words, it's one thing to honor your team members, and to treat them as I'm describing, but the expectation should also be that there is gratitude from the

[Practicing with the Masters](#) with Allison Watts, DDS

# Ep #65: Effective Leadership and Problem Solving with Andrea Clasen

employee. In other words, when they see this is your culture, they are thrilled to have arrived in a place where this is how they'll be treated, and you, as the business owner, feel appreciated. It is coming back to you in that way. It isn't, "What else do I get? How much more can you do for me?" That should be a red flag that maybe you have someone on the team that doesn't fit.

One of the things I spend, obviously, an inordinate amount of time with these types of businesses, is to find people that fit, and they use a company called Talent Plus out of Nebraska. Talent Plus can help them interview and sort through people's innate and natural talents to see if they have a desire to serve, help people, and part of this type of organization. I don't know if you've heard of that company.

Allison: I haven't but I wrote it down.

Andrea: It is not inexpensive, but it can go to what you decide your budget can be, and where you are in practice, if it make sense. Since I started, since I was introduced to them, they have now formed a healthcare division, so they're even more in tune with what is needed in the healthcare field. If you called them, and said, "I am interviewing for a treatment coordinator who will present treatment to my patients," they will interview and give you a complete profile of this person you're interviewing, to tell you if this individual has the characteristic of positively. They can deal with objections and stay motivated towards the treatment you're going to present. Their belief is by age seven, individuals have this innate talent, and they just have to sort it out through the interview, and they can share that with you. Yes, it's an investment, but it can be a worthwhile one. Talent Plus is easy to find online. They're wonderful to work with.

# Ep #65: Effective Leadership and Problem Solving with Andrea Clasen

That's a big piece to the puzzle here. To have people that, what we say, fit verses maybe keeping someone that ... Back up, one of the innate natural talents that Talent Plus will tell you, is that it is a natural talent for someone to smile. If, for example, you hire someone, or you've ever had someone working for you, and they don't smile, not ever. They probably aren't going to. Giving them a bonus isn't going to work.

Allison: Right.

Andrea: You might as well just have a conversation with them. If in fact this doesn't come to pass in a short time, in realizing they are maybe very well suited in another position, or they are well suited for another practice, or type of work. Maybe they don't fit in your practice for the culture you are growing, building, because that one individual can be detrimental to what you're doing here. You don't have to get angry at it, it's really just, "Maybe we made the wrong selection, we want you to go on to do what you do, and we will move on as well." The Ritz Carlton determines this in 21 days of employment. After 21 days they decide whether or not they have a fit or not.

Allison: Wow.

Andrea: That just takes it away from some offices I work with that may keep an employee a year, two, or three, or four years, and when I step in they say they're still training them. I have to give them the bad news that they're probably not going to change. That is then where the confrontation is needed.

Allison: You know what that says to me? That says that they are super clear about what they're looking for and what the expectations are, and there's a lot of clarity if you can see that in 21 days.

# Ep #65: Effective Leadership and Problem Solving with Andrea Clasen

Andrea: They're very, very clear. Of course, they've got a wonderful program, and it's difficult to do any of these things in a dental practice. I do know that. You would be surprised how many of the things you can incorporate and accomplish more. It is worth it because it really isn't all or nothing. You can pull out pieces of this and make changes that are very positive. One is that you just take away the frustration of constantly looking at someone to say, "Why aren't they doing this or that?" Really realize maybe their talents just don't lay where your needs are. You should release them and they can go on to have a great life. If you're not happy, they probably aren't happy either. I'm a firm believer that if you have a cohesive team, and you're all happy together, and that synergy is there within your culture, it is and of itself internal marketing.

Patients know that when they're on the premises. They can feel the way you react to one another, how you're gracious, and kind, and thank each other when you work together. They love that. They want to be in your environment when they're around that verses when they can tell there's tension between an assistant and the doctor. Or, there's someone at the front office and the back office. Patients will even ask an individual, "Is there something with Mary? She doesn't seem very happy today." That's working against your internal marketing. You could spend a fortune on all kinds of marketing things you're doing and it can just kind of fall apart if you don't have those basics in order where a team is cohesive and there is just general graciousness between them. To have that, people have to fit in their positions well. Like I said earlier, have gratitude and humility.

When I go back a couple comments more on the hiring, when the training ... The training is extensive, of course. When they're finished with training, the general manager steps back in with

[Practicing with the Masters](#) with Allison Watts, DDS

# Ep #65: Effective Leadership and Problem Solving with Andrea Clasen

employees. Usually there's four to seven in a group, because they've been going through training, even though they have different position, they all have been going through their own training. They come back together, collectively, for things that they all must know about the hotel. At the very end of the 21 days, when it's kind of the point where they'll be brought on board permanently, the general manager comes in again. He meets the, by the way, on their first day. Sits down again on this day 21 and he says to them, "Do we walk the talk? You've been through hours, and hours, of training now, and I want to now know from you if you think we do what we say we do. I'd like to hear from you."

There's a tremendous amount of respect that's given to these new employees coming on board. When the general manager asks this question, I mean, that's pretty special. That he takes the time to listen and hear what they have to say. I've often thought that if the dentist sat down with the new employee one on one, and shared his or her story of how they came to be in dentistry, the history of the practice, and why they believe what they do, then sit down again with that new employee in a week or two when they have been through the office for a while. Sit down and ask the employee, "Now what do you think of us? How do you think we're doing? I know when I met you I shared with you what we want to be. Do you think we live up to that?" I think it garners tremendous respect from the new employee and it sets the stage for that culture.

The second question that general manager asks is, "What would you change here at the hotel to make it better?" In the same direction, listening, taking notes, taking it serious, and putting them on the same level with that respect.

Allison: I love that.

[Practicing with the Masters](#) with Allison Watts, DDS

# Ep #65: Effective Leadership and Problem Solving with Andrea Clasen

Andrea: The third are of the leadership, I mentioned the first was to create the loyalty with the employee. The second to make sure that you have people that fit your culture and your organization. Of course, that means you have to know what that culture is, and what you're striving for, so you can determine the fit. The third one is to empower your employees, which is trust them. Trust them to make decisions. Tell them that there is no complaint manager in the office, there is no manager they'll report to. You want to trust them that when something goes wrong, the patient is unhappy, you want them to do what they can do to make that patient happy. Maybe you can talk about some examples to give them ideas, but to take action. Not only if they make a mistake, those things can happen, and that might become a teachable moment, but you do want them to take action, and we will honor you for that.

Acknowledge outstanding service by anyone on the team in your meetings. Announce their name, announce what they do in the morning huddle. Let them stand out. Don't keep that a secret. Stand up and support an employee when a conflict arises with a patient. If a patient is upset then they're giving your employee a tough time, tell the people that work for you, "Call on me right away. I'll step out and speak to the patient. I can't at that moment, I'll call them later, but I have your back. I will speak to them." I cannot tell you how many office I am in where the dentist will not speak to the patient. They will almost hide. They almost go into their office and tell the person, "No, that's your job. Just tell them do this or tell them that." I have one office where doctor said, "You know what? If that's how the patient feels, I don't need them." That's not going to bode well. I think if that's how the dentist feels, he should maybe have a conversation with the patient, and tell the patient maybe they



# Ep #65: Effective Leadership and Problem Solving with Andrea Clasen

don't fit in the practice. I think they need to stand up and support the employee.

I mentioned earlier provide services to your employee in a timely manner. Create a support system for a new employee. Make sure a new employee always has a buddy, somebody that's going to partner with them for at least a week, so that shows them the ropes. Where you go to lunch. They're their friend. Prepare a welcome folder for a new employee that tells about the practice, and they get a welcome letter, just like a patient would. Whatever you do for a patient, set the same example for employees. Then, as I had said, I believe that will come back to be rewarded and you will see a very positive culture develop.

Now with all this wonderfulness, it's like Disneyland here. Where everything is perfect, obviously things don't always go smooth, and there's mishaps, and things occur, and so now with all of this work and energy you've put into it, and now you will ... Obviously there will be days when you'll see things go wrong, and things that are bothersome, that are not what you expect. They are not in your mind what you set as expectation, that's a conflict, and there's no question, you know when that occurs because you can feel it in your stomach. You feel lit physiologically. You can get uncomfortable and it's just critical that you take action right away. The longer you wait, the worse it is for you. The more it can build where you are now more loaded with emotion when you are going to discuss it.

I encourage with any type of a conflict or problems, that you address it immediate. That you kind of have a mindset. You have this attitude where I'm going to look at confronting an individual as being an honest leader with integrity. In other words, if I don't share my concern, I'm not being honest. I'm

[Practicing with the Masters](#) with Allison Watts, DDS

# Ep #65: Effective Leadership and Problem Solving with Andrea Clasen

going to practice a truth to power style of leadership. If something bothers me, I owe it to the person I believe cares about the practice, to talk about it, and find out if I'm on the right track. That some type of self talking to push you to address it and not let it go more than a day or two, or certainly a week, because this is the difficult part. This is the part where things fall apart.

If one employee starts going off the grid, and they are no longer in alignment on something, they start coming in late, they are not prepared in the morning huddle, they are not doing their part at the end of the day and leave early, a variety of things. Now, other team members become resentful and the entire ... The cracks start to form. What you have tried to build will not continue. It will start to fall apart. To know that's at stake, all that work, all that effort is at stake if you don't step forward. I'd ask each doctor to just think about it as a positive way to get back on track and get back to purpose.

The second point ... The first one is to take the truth to power approach. The second point I want to make is ask yourself first, as you're going to approach the person, "Is there some part of this that I have a responsibility for?" In other words, the issue at hand, did I cover that thoroughly? Did I discuss that with this employee? Did I state the expectations regarding this issue? More than half of the time you'll discover that it has not been clarified. It's now a reminder that that's what the meeting will be about. It will start with, "Mary I have an apology. I want to discuss how we handle the telephone because I did not ... I realize I never covered that with you when you started. I just assumed, because you had 15 years experience that you would handle our telephone the way I would expect, but I can see that the way you may have done it in the past is slightly different. I'd like to review that, because I noticed today that some of the

[Practicing with the Masters](#) with Allison Watts, DDS

# Ep #65: Effective Leadership and Problem Solving with Andrea Clasen

things you said were not in compliance with what I would like represented of this practice."

You take it as a teaching moment. If you have a manager you would do it with them or they might take over at that point, or you have a staff member do the training, whatever it is. That it is brought to your attention immediately with, "We overlooked that, I apologize. Let's make sure we cover it."

Third, identify the problem correctly. Is the problem the behavior issue of a person or is it a breakdown in one of your systems? You have a system in the office that actually is broken, and the employee was following the system, that was actually the problem. Try to identify did the system breakdown, is it an inefficiency, is it a communication breakdown, have that in order when you sit down with the person to talk. What I mentioned was to take action quickly, sit down with the person privately, and giving them the benefit of the doubt, "That maybe you realize what you were saying, or doing, and I want to hear how you view this, if you could tell me what you were thinking when you were taking action on that. Maybe it will help me better understand what I was seeing."

I'd like to pause because I've not taken a breath here and ask questions about conflict resolution and what questions could come up at this point. Because I know that this is a difficult piece.

Allison: Yeah, it is for a lot of people. Real life, this sounds great, I love what you're saying. Actually you're giving us a lot of beautiful, what's the word I'm looking for? The words are very clean. There's not a lot of stuff on it, you know? I think a lot of it has to do with how we come to the conversation. Like you said, if we wait too long, or if we have made up stories, or we're not clear

# Ep #65: Effective Leadership and Problem Solving with Andrea Clasen

on these pieces that you're saying, then we come to the conversation with some resentment, or fear, or different things in the way.

Andrea: It's so easy to go to someone and say, "You know, I could be wrong here. I may have misread what I saw today." Just make it so difficult. Just go in for conversation. Take the person aside to sit down, look them in the eye, and say, "I want to talk. I would like to share something I observed today. I'd like to have your input. I'm very ... There will be issues that you're actually angry about, and annoyed, or frustrated, and you'll have to express that," but if it's in private, and you want to hear from them first. If you come from this feeling where you don't believe people intentionally are trying to do harm, they're not intentionally making a mistake, they're not intentionally trying to sabotage the flow. I think you bring out the best in people.

It's easier for you on that end of the conversation. You don't have to come in with the answers, you don't have to come with authority. Remember, it's a win-win conclusion where you want the employee to feel they have a voice. You want to be sure you're clear that you're going to back what you had intended. It's easier to have a confrontation when you start with, "I am concerned and I want to know more about this," than, "You did something wrong. You made a mistake. What were you thinking?" That will often happen when you wait too long and you get too angry. Then you come in with a little too much emotion and your message is harder to clarify.

Allison: I can relate to that.

Andrea: ... distinct examples and it's so easy to talk about any one, because we all deal with this every day.

# Ep #65: Effective Leadership and Problem Solving with Andrea Clasen

Allison: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Andrea: I'm constantly trying to do a better job at my communication when I have to confront something. I found great value in this with my children, that's where I really learned the tough stuff. That was the hardest because it was packed with emotion, so it's easier for me to teach in a dental office actually. Harder at home with the close relationships at home but it's all the same.

Allison: Awesome, well let me just check and see if anybody has a question. If you do you can push star two. Does anybody have any questions so far? I think especially now that we're getting into confrontation, is there anything anybody wants Andrea to get into a little more?

No.

Andrea: I'd like to think that's a good thing that everyone has this figured out a little bit and doing okay with it.

Allison: Yeah. You know, one of the things you and I talked about that I really appreciated is when we talked before this call, getting ready, is to really be clear on the front end too, about what you stand for. You talked about the practice being clear on your practice philosophy, being clear on your team philosophy, and your values, and when you come to talk to them, it's easier because you can go back to, instead of it being personal, or it's about what they did wrong, or about them specifically. It's about this is not what we agreed on or this is not what we stand for. You can still come with the questions but that there's something to talk about as far as an agreement that's been seemingly broken, or there's been a misunderstanding, and I just want to clear it up, right?

# Ep #65: Effective Leadership and Problem Solving with Andrea Clasen

Andrea: I think, yeah, that's exactly. I think when you do the work on the front end, if you have your beliefs, or philosophy, whatever it is, it doesn't have to post. Just whatever it is that you write, and you put your thoughts together so you can be clear when your team ... when someone new comes on board. Sometimes even with the team you have now, you could decide you wanted to take a different turn in the practice and you want to clarify things you haven't set as clear before to your existing employees. Whatever shape it takes, it could be a new person coming on board, or it could be an existing employee, but to have this really crystal clear in writing, sit down and review it with individuals, or with the group. Do so repeatedly. What they say at the Ritz Carlton, give it legs, give it life. Repeat it once a week in the morning huddle, what your purpose statement is.

You're right, then when you have a conflict, and you sit down to talk about it, take the person to the issue that's at hand. Relate it back to your purpose. Explain how it does or does not fit and why this can get the practice off track, which is what you were saying, and keeps it from being your personal issue with them. It is the practice purpose that's behind it. It's the center point, it's the focal point in the center. I think it's easier on you, again, to address issues when you have that at the core. It helps the employee relate better to what they have to get back on track with, and why.

Allison: You know, and I can't help but thinking about the ... This might be getting too much too late into the conversation, but I know there's always room for conversation. There comes a time, can you speak just a little bit about how many times would you have this conversation before you just go, "Okay, this is not happening," I get it with the new employee, but there's a time when it's enough is enough of being curious, and being kind,

# Ep #65: Effective Leadership and Problem Solving with Andrea Clasen

and being ... You can't be curious and kind and then go, but you know what I mean when it's time to cut ...

Andrea: Here's something I don't see happen enough. It's that conversation when you're willing to go at it again. You're going to discuss it again, you're going to clarify it again, you have to say to the employee, "I need your agreement and I want to hear from you how you're going to step into doing what you do differently now." What I don't see happen is I don't see the employee ever have to talk. If there's a confrontation, if the dentist sits down with someone, and talks to them about the issue, they usually do all the talking, they end the conversation with, "We're finished now," so the assumption is this employee is going to go back and do things right now. Right?

Allison: Yeah.

Andrea: Very seldom is the conversation turns to the employee to say, "Could you share with me now, what you can learn from this, what you feel you'll do different, and what is your commitment going forward?" They have to speak. If someone doesn't buy in, if they have an attitude, and they're sitting there with their arms folded, their eyes rolling, you aren't even going to have a second meeting.

Allison: Right.

Andrea: You can active listen the body language. You can say, "You know, I could be wrong, but I don't think you're on board. Just looking at you and not having any response gives me the impression you are not committed to what we're doing. Am I right or wrong?" I'm going to force an answer or force them out.

Allison: Yeah.

# Ep #65: Effective Leadership and Problem Solving with Andrea Clasen

Andrea: I'm presenting all of this with this huge push to give this benefit of the doubt. To really go the extra mile to be sure you're going to do your part, let's say, as the leader. You do draw the line. you don't pamper this from meeting, to meeting, to meeting. Your expectation should be that in their being appreciative or gracious to have this position, they will speak and say, "You know, I want this job, and I will do better. I would like another chance." Right?

Allison: Yeah. For sure.

Andrea: I'm sure you've had meetings with employees and you did not hear that.

Allison: Yes, and I'm sure I've done also what you said the dentist talks the whole time, and then basically says, "Understood? Okay, great." Then documents everything, but yeah.

Andrea: Sometimes there's almost a fear, because when you go into those meetings, you cannot have an agenda, or you cannot have a plan in your head that this is going to work out. You have to go in neutral. Your expectations are that they are going to make a statement that convinces you this is worth another go. All too often, because you don't want to rehire, you don't want to train new people, it's a hassle, time consuming, it costs money. You have in the back of your mind sometimes, "I want to this to go well, so I'll just get through it, and get them back to work." When the reality is they really kind of never bought into it. They went through the meeting, and you'll find after about a week, they go right back to the previous behavior. Now, you can't go back to the paper that said they agreed, you can't go back to say, "When we met you gave your commitment, you said you were going to try to make this work." You can't even



# Ep #65: Effective Leadership and Problem Solving with Andrea Clasen

say that when you meet the second time because they never said it.

Get that commitment from them, or expect that, because if you do some of the things I'm asking, you deserve that back. That's been a give and take relationship and it's now working. Have that expectation and give yourself credit for that.

I met with the executive catering director at the Four Seasons recently, because I have this study group and we meet there. I was arranging the meeting and while I spoke with her at length about the arrangements, she was raving about the hotel. I said, "You sure are happy here." She said, "Well this is like working at Disneyland." She said, "I love this place." I said, "Well ... " She was about 26 to 30 years old. I say that because some of the younger generation we have found different attitudes come up lately. I was extra surprised and impressed that she was the age she was, and she had this very gracious attitude, and said, well, she said, "You know, I was raised by my grandparents and they taught me that I should be grateful that I have a job, so when I came here and they treat me so well, I'm just grateful that I found them, because I just appreciate every day here, and I know that they appreciate what I do for them."

Those are the statements. That's what I'm looking for. The back and forth. Where they give a lot but the employee is appreciating it.

Allison: Yeah.

Andrea: You could see she was doing marketing right there on the scene. Right at that moment she was marketing that hotel.

# Ep #65: Effective Leadership and Problem Solving with Andrea Clasen

Allison: Yeah, and like you said, it's not coming from something that she was told to do. It's coming from a genuine, from her heart. That's a totally different vibe.

Andrea: Yeah.

Allison: So much easier, I love what you're talking about. I love this. You know, Andrea, it's funny, I remember learning this from you 20 something years ago. I'm also remember forgetting some of it, but it's such a refreshing conversation. I really don't hear anybody else talking about the doctor treating the employee, that being our first concern, and making sure that they're loved, and well taken care of. That we're getting their dental needs met on time. We're making it a positive experience for them every day and then they make it a positive experience for our patients. Naturally, that comes from that.

Andrea: Yeah. Even when there's been information out there about five star service, and things, and I've listened to some of it, still I've heard the conversation go to what we can do for patients, some of the amenities they offer, the special touches, and how they can put information in the computer, they know things about the guest coming to the hotel, we can do that. In dental office with the computer we can make sure we put the information, the patient wants a blanket, and a back pillow, and so on. The conversations have still been going to the special amenities and services we can do for our patient, but I have not heard ... That's all well and good, but you must have people that want to do this. They are motivated to do it, they find joy from doing it. They describe the housekeeper at the hotel that as she leaves the room when she's cleaned it, she backs out of the room and closes door taking one last look in the room, to see everything is in place, and it's beautiful, because that is the experience she's going to give the guest.

# Ep #65: Effective Leadership and Problem Solving with Andrea Clasen

You can't force someone to do that. You can't give them a bonus and make them do that. That is in their heart. That is what gives them joy. You must try your best to instill this in people that have this innate interest in doing it. Then it's just fun and it's easier on you so you don't have to prod people daily. You don't nag them, or whatever it is you might think you would have to do. They're one step ahead of you. Now it's not easy to find these people, but when you have the vision to have this, maybe you have one or two people on your team that you could identify right now that would be of this caliber. They would have this belief system and this talent. You could engage them to help you bring others on board to do this and acquire more of a team doing it that way.

Allison: Yeah. I love the ... What's it called? The resource, Talent Plus too.

Andrea: That was a real find. I wish I could get more dentists to use them, but I do understand it is expensive, and as we all know, there are no guarantees when you hire someone no matter what the interview. It has to fit within the budget, it has to make sense, but it certainly is worth contacting them, and learning more about it. Because it's been years since I learned what their cost is, and how it's done, so it used to be that they would do it over the phone, and they would interview people by phone, and then send you, the dentist, a report and a screening.

I've had my husband is a physician, I've had him do this when he hired his medical assistant. They told him that his medical assistant ... When they screen they encouraged him to avoid hiring one particular medical assistant because they said she wouldn't express compassion. He hired her anyway and that's

# Ep #65: Effective Leadership and Problem Solving with Andrea Clasen

exactly what happened is that she did not have compassion with the patients. It's been interesting.

Allison: Wow, well thank you so much. I know we're at time Andrea. Is there anything else you want to say to close?

Andrea: Well, I just feel like I want to make sure everyone stays positive a can be. I know it can be discouraging but to continue to have the belief in a vision like I've described. Get as close as you can because I think it can bring the most joy to practice and it's really about bringing that relationship in first and starting with your employees, creating that relationship, and the business success will follow.

Allison: Yeah, and if anybody has any questions, or wants to get ahold of you Andrea, do you want to give a phone number, or email, or something?

Andrea: I can be contacted through my website which is Clasen Consulting, or I can receive an email at [Andrea@ClasenConsulting.com](mailto:Andrea@ClasenConsulting.com). My phone number is 949-675-9853. Mine is the only important point to note about my email, my website is just spelled Clasen, C-L-A-S-E-N. I'm happy to answer whatever may come up.

Allison: Wonderful, thank you for being here tonight Andrea. Thank you all for being here, spending your hour with us to learn how to be better. Better dentists, better at all we do. I know everybody here cares a great deal so thank you for being here.

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).

# Ep #65: Effective Leadership and Problem Solving with Andrea Clasen