

# What No One Feels Safe Enough to Say



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## The Hidden Driver of Performance in Dental Practices

Most dental practices believe their biggest problems are clinical or financial.

They focus on technology, new treatments, marketing strategies, and production targets.

But in reality, the most expensive problems in a dental practice are often invisible.

They are not in the numbers.

They are not in the equipment.

They are in what people **don't say**.

## The Invisible Barrier Inside Every Practice

In many clinics, everything seems to work:

- The schedule is full
- The team is present
- The doctor is producing

And yet, something feels off.

There are tensions.

Misalignments.

Unspoken frustrations.

Team members notice inefficiencies, but stay silent.

Assistants see problems, but don't speak up.

Front desk teams adapt instead of addressing issues.

Not because they don't care.

But because they don't feel safe enough to speak.

## The Real KPI: Psychological Safety

There is a concept widely discussed in high-performing organizations, but still largely ignored in dentistry:

**Psychological Safety.**

It is the ability of a team member to say:

- "Something is not working"
- "I made a mistake"
- "We can do this better"

...without fear of judgment, punishment, or conflict.

Research on team performance consistently shows that without psychological safety:

- Problems stay hidden
- Communication breaks down
- Accountability disappears

And performance declines: even if production numbers look stable.

In dentistry, this is even more critical.

Because every inefficiency in communication directly impacts:

- Case acceptance
- Patient experience
- Treatment outcomes
- Team retention

## The Cost of Silence

Silence inside a dental practice has a cost.

And it is much higher than most doctors realize.

When people don't speak:

- Small issues become systemic problems
- Errors are repeated instead of corrected
- Processes remain inefficient
- Patients feel inconsistency

Over time, this creates:

- Lower profitability
- Higher staff turnover
- Increased stress for the doctor

And ironically, more control from leadership, which often makes the problem worse.

## The Leadership Illusion

Many practices believe their problem is:

- A "difficult team member"
- Lack of motivation
- Poor execution

But in most cases, the real issue is different.

It is a lack of alignment at the leadership level.

When leadership is not aligned, the team will always follow the path of least resistance.

And when people feel that speaking up leads to conflict, they simply stop speaking.

## The Role of the Dental Office Manager

This is where the Dental Office Manager becomes critical.

Not as an administrator.

Not as a coordinator.

But as a **translator of the system**.

The manager sits at the intersection between:

- Clinical decisions
- Operational processes
- Human dynamics

And has a unique responsibility:

To create an environment where people can speak without fear.

This does not mean creating comfort.

It means creating clarity, consistency, and trust.

Because safety does not come from being "nice".

It comes from being **predictable and fair**.

## From Control to Clarity

Many doctors respond to inefficiency by increasing control:

- More rules
- More protocols
- More supervision

But control does not solve the problem.

It often hides it.

High-performing practices do something different:

They create systems where:

- Expectations are clear
- Communication is structured
- Feedback is normal
- Mistakes are addressed, not punished

In these environments, people don't need to be pushed.

They contribute.

## Europe vs. The Emerging Conversation

In the United States, especially in management communities, this topic is becoming central.

In Europe, it is still largely absent.

We continue to focus on:

- Clinical excellence
- Technology
- Financial metrics

All important.

But incomplete.

Because without addressing the human system behind the practice, growth remains fragile.

## What Leaders Should Start Asking

If you want to understand the real health of a dental practice, don't start from production. Start from these questions:

- Can my team tell me when something is not working?
- Do people feel safe admitting mistakes?
- Are problems discussed openly or avoided?
- Is feedback part of our daily routine?

If the answer is no, the problem is already there.

Even if you don't see it yet.

## Final Insight

In every dental practice, there are two realities.

The one you can measure.

And the one people don't talk about.

The first one appears in reports.

The second one determines everything.

Because what limits a practice is not what you see.

It is what no one feels safe enough to say.

And until that changes, no system, no technology, and no clinical excellence will ever be enough.