



# Defining wholearchy

## How to create a republic of dental team members

I am in a friendly debate with my oldest son, a millennial. Seeking his input and feedback, I approached him with what I considered to be a bright idea—submitting a new word to the Google dictionary. Although he strongly supports the meaning of the word, he thinks the word itself “cheesy.” I am appealing to my readers to help me determine if my loving, blunt son is correct!

The word in question is “wholearchy.” So, what does wholearchy mean? The objective of this article is to develop a definition. The best example of its meaning is illustrated in the following real-life account. This story exemplifies wholearchy (versus hierarchy) in a most beautiful way. It is a story of collaboration, respect, and success. It exemplifies a strong leader who recognized every player as valuable, giving equal rights to all. This story is about a unique organization—an organization that is today referred to as a republic of children.

A Polish pediatrician, Dr. Janusz Korczak, created this innovative republic. Known as the “father of children’s rights,”<sup>1</sup> he believed that even children’s voices should be heard. He managed his orphanage as a wholearchy from the 1920s to World War II. In this orphanage, each child had an equal voice, value, and rights. In addition, each child was a team player with duties, chores, and responsibilities. It was the children themselves who determined if a job was done satisfactorily or if it needed improvement. It was the children who judged behavior. If children felt mistreated in any way, they could take their complaints to court. The five judges of this court were other children in the orphanage and were rotated weekly.<sup>1</sup> Every resident of the orphanage had the opportunity to learn about the importance of fairness.

When Korczak needed to teach values, he would write a story and use discussion to enable the children to discover the values. What they had to say was as important as what he had to say. Curiosity was encouraged and the minimal education that the children received in the village school was enhanced not only with the pursuit of their personal interests, but also with the study of art, music, and writing. The children leaving this orphanage were said to be more highly educated than the graduates of elite private schools

of the day.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Korczak offered a framework for success to all children who passed through his orphanage, no matter their heritage. During World War II, the German army came to take the Jewish children away. Korczak was faced with a dilemma. Although he himself was exempt from the Nazis’ cruelty, he considered his role of caregiver as his life’s purpose. Instead of abandoning the Jewish children, he provided steadfast support and strength for his charges. The children and Korczak went to their deaths in an extermination camp.<sup>2</sup>

This story moves me profoundly. Not only is the ultimate sacrifice of Dr. Korczak’s life a demonstration of his character and love, but his commitment to the republic of children also demonstrates clearly what I envision for the meaning of wholearchy. He ensured that even within the framework of his leadership, there was wholearchy. Equal rights, equal say, outstanding results.

I can’t help but wonder how we can create a wholearchical model within dental offices. How can we flatten the top-down delivery of power to create lateral empowerment for all team members? How can we create a framework that achieves cohesiveness through mutual respect of

everyone in the organization?

Wholearchy is about creating a republic of team. It is an environment that results in a value-added organization, one where a framework of win/win is created and adhered to. Research in successful work environments today show that it is better to metaphorically grow

“Do we understand that there is room to explore the principle that the sum of the whole is greater than the sum of the parts? Has everyone on the dental team had a fair shake; has everyone been heard?”

AUTHOR NAME, bio



the piece of the pie and share it equally among the stakeholders than to fight over the size of a slice that someone has tried to take for themselves.

The opposite hierarchical system promotes value-claiming behavior.<sup>3</sup> Its delivery of “I win, you lose” sees individuals competing to get the biggest piece of the pie. Discord occurs as the scarcity mentality causes the players to fight over the size of their slices. In dental offices, we see this in bullying behavior and a “what’s in it for me” attitude.

In this system, it is not uncommon for the person driving their point to distort their own preferences to get their way. Someone pushing value-claiming behavior will reiterate their position louder and louder and more and more forcibly. This behavior is polarizing. It is about hardball negotiations and harms relationships, ultimately harming the office. Unlike in Korczak’s model, equal weight on positions is not given. The tactics used can obstruct even the visitation of other team players’ ideas, and there is a lack of understanding the underlying goals and objectives of the office. Hierarchy crowds out creativity and makes it difficult to see that a win/win opportunity exists.<sup>3</sup>

The more egalitarian model of wholearchy is about value creation through collaboration, consensus building, and cooperation. This

model encourages and enhances joint action.<sup>3</sup> It creates room for solutions that all parties can live with. It flattens the hierarchical system and searches for joint value. It is about creating something new, growing the pie, and allowing everyone to have an equal say in the value that is created.

Cooperation is the influencing factor and the ultimate win is that we don’t leave unexplored value on the table because one person is claiming the value for him- or herself. By adapting a framework where wholearchy exists, we can advance our own goals and objectives while helping others. The result is that we reach a higher value that is good for the overall team.

Inevitably, people will have different interests and it is important to explore these. A wholearchical system will explore the zone of possible agreement.<sup>3</sup> Do we understand that there is room to explore the principle that the sum of the whole is greater than the sum of the parts? What is the alternative in negotiating an agreement? Has everyone on the dental team had a fair shake; has everyone been heard? Are we providing a safe environment for everyone?

The premise of Dr. Korczak’s orphanage was one of respect for all children as whole beings . . . mind, body, and spirit. Every child

counted and every child had value to bring to the group. Although it is true that love cannot be legislated, it is also true that we can create the conditions where love can flourish.

In the dental office, we also cannot legislate fairness, but we can create the conditions where fairness can flourish. The result will be success and fulfillment for the team and the entire office!

This is the definition I’d submit to Google: Wholearchy—a system or organization in which people are recognized as whole beings, with equal value, sharing a focus on what is best for the whole. I welcome my readers’ thoughts, insights, or inspirations to help offset my son’s judgment that the word wholearchy is “cheesy.” Because, you know, I need to win this debate! **RDH**

## REFERENCES

1. Tremonti AM. What Canada’s child welfare system can learn from a WWII Polish orphanage. CBC Radio website. <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/friday-december-11-2015-1.3360502/what-canada-s-child-welfare-system-can-learn-from-a-wwii-polish-orphanage-1.3360522>. Published December 11, 2015. Accessed March 29, 2016.
2. Who was Janusz Korczak? Janusz Korczak Communication – Center website. <http://korczak.com/Biography/kap-1who.htm>. Accessed March 29, 2016.
3. Roberto MA. Transformational Leadership: How Leaders Change Teams, Companies and Organizations [CD-ROM]. Chantilly, Virginia: The Great Courses.