One or two employees don’t make a ‘team’

If you are losing good employees on a regular basis, do you know why?

By Sally McKenzie, CEO

I recently had a conversation with a dentist on his Web designer. I often find that Web designers are not user friendly because business owners want to look good and insist upon their own specific design ideas. Web designers are in business just like you are, so this can sometimes mean they have to sacrifice the effectiveness of the site due to demands from their clients. Their customers are always right, even if they don’t know what they are doing.

Consider these recommendations and evaluate your Web site from a visitor’s point of view. If your Web site needs updating or changes, contact your Webmaster and talk it over. Your practice growth depends on it.

If not, I can virtually guarantee that they think you neither recognize nor appreciate what they are doing for you and your practice.

Silent soldiers

Oftentimes, when good employees leave, dentists claim they had no idea the employee wasn’t happy. Consider the “super manager” in the example above.

Why didn’t she speak up? It’s not uncommon for the good employees to remain silent. They don’t want to bother the dentist.

They just keep taking the pressure, being the good stewards that they are until they crack. In reality, they are probably little “suckers” who have done too change her situation.

In situations such as this, the dentist simply will not or cannot see what is happening. This particular dentist believes that his office manager is responsible for “managing” every aspect of the office as the dentist sees it.

In addition, as far as the dentist was concerned: it worked, so why change it? For the employee, she saw only one way to remedy the situation: quit.

The fact is that it is easy to ignore the good employees. After all, they don’t have to be coddled. They can be counted on to get the job done, and they are low- to even no-maintenance.

The dentist tells him/herself that these employees know what they are doing.

They are good. They are independent. They can handle the additional responsibility. They don’t need or want feedback or coaching.

Mary Kay Miller is founder and CEO of Orthopreneur™ Marketing Solutions. After 50-plus years as a business and marketing coordinator for professional practices, Mary Kay has narrowed her marketing expertise to Internet Web 2.0 marketing, SEO (search engine optimization) and the creation of marketing systems to save teams valuable time and effort.

Her book, “Marketing Your Practice Through Different Eyes,” was released in May 2008 and is a free 100-page eBook available on her Web site www.orthopreneur.com. It is the first multi-media eBook of its kind in dentistry and the first book ever written on marketing for both dentists and team members. It enables dentists and staff members to understand and experience for themselves how the Internet and Web 2.0 marketing engages and grabs the attention of today’s consumer.

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However, thinking this is a big mistake.

Your top performers resent that they show up on time (or early), work hard every day, consistently meet or exceed their performance goals, and you say virtually nothing. But you’re going “gaga” over the totally unreliable assistant’s ability to actually take an X-ray that you can read!

Which leads me to another key reason why good employees are hard to keep: You refuse to deal with the problem performers.

There are few things more demoralizing to top-flight staff than a boss who looks the other way when others on the team consistently disregard office policies, bring poor attitudes to work, generate conflict, make excuse after excuse for why they were late, why they were sick, why they simply cannot get their jobs done.

Believe me, your silent soldiers know exactly who’s doing just enough to get by. Yet, they get the same pay raises, same vacation time and the same perks as top performers.

Understandably, capable staff will only tolerate this for so long. As Vince Lombardi once said, “There is nothing more unequal than the equal treatment of unequals.”

Ultimately, the good employees arrive at the conclusion that the dentist is either a coward or simply prefers the poor performers, so they choose to leave and go to a practice where their contributions are appreciated and the culture encourages rather than discourages excellence.

Wake-up call

It usually takes a seriously troubling event — such as a major financial shortfall, the departure of a critical employee, etc. — for the clinician to wake up to the fact there might be a problem.

From there it takes an outsider, such as a practice management consultant, to sit down with the dentist and discuss his/her frustrations, why he/she cannot trust other staff members, determine where the system shortfalls are occurring, assess training weaknesses and get to the bottom of why the dentist cannot, or will not, lead his/her team.

The case of the super manager above is particularly unfortunate because clearly the dentist had a very dedicated and highly competent employee, which is common. Practices will have one or two rock-solid staff and a host of mediocre chair warmers.

Instead of creating systems of accountability, instituting training programs, developing job descriptions, etc., clinicians will simply pile the critical duties on those that they know they can count on. Ultimately, everyone loses.

The good employees eventually break or burn out. The weak employees are never given the opportunity to grow and flourish.

Moreover, the dentist is losing a fortune because, whether he/she acknowledges it or not, things are falling through the cracks simply because there are not enough capable hands on deck to ensure they don’t.

If you’re losing good employees, don’t just sit back, shake your head and tell yourself “good help is hard to keep.” Find out what is driving the exodus and seek outside assistance if necessary.

Once you get to the root of the problem, I guarantee you’ll see the improvement in your bottom line.

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About the author

Sally McKenzie is CEO of McKenzie Management, which provides success-proven management solutions to dental practitioners nationwide. She is also editor of The Dentist’s Network Newsletter at www.thedentistsnetwork.net, the e-Management Newsletter from www.mckenziemgmt.com; and The New Dentist® magazine, www.thenewdentist.net. She can be reached at (877) 777-6151 or sallymck@mckenziemgmt.com.