Staff Members – Are they an Asset or Liability to your Practice?

When a dentist looks at his or her practice, there are many components or parts that bring it all together. If the observation is that all the parts are working in sync that’s great, but if they are functioning separately, then the practice will be less effective, see less patients, make less income and many other types of problems and situations occur.

If the parts that are working individually are the staff members and the doctor, we are talking about the fundamentals of a practice and whether it is a great place to work or an uncomfortable workplace. I want to talk about the relationship between a dentist and his staff. This is such a basic part of a practice which can also be and usually is, the most complicated.

Why Hiring The Right Staff Matters

Your employees are an extension of you, the doctor. They were hired to help you get more done, allow you to see patients and help you with all the aspects of running a practice. Ideally, they know what is expected of them and allow you to have peace of mind knowing that they are working hard to represent you to your patients, vendors, etc.

But as we well know, that isn’t always the case. When we hire individuals to become part of our team, our team players are much more than an assistant, front desk coordinator, etc. We have living breathing human beings who are talented, have a personality that fits in with the culture of the practice or doesn’t. They have personal lives, things happening outside of work that can creep in to the office. In other words, it’s not simple. I understand why some dentists have no desire to handle their staff outside of how they assist them in their operatories. It can be complicated.

It’s one thing to have a the latest, state of the art piece of equipment in your practice. It usually does what it was intended and aside from the payment, it’s supposed to help you do more efficiently or effectively and it doesn’t talk back to you (unless it breaks down, then it speaks volumes!)
A Visual Exercise

Let’s take this a different direction, as we know how important our team is to our success. I want to create a visual situation here. If you were to take an office and remove the dentist and staff, what do you have? You have an office that can’t function on its own.

It takes the entire team to run a practice and teams to run a large group.

Dentists Are Human too

The doctors I have had the pleasure to work with are just like everybody else. They are single, married, many have families, and some get divorced. They have kids that get in to trouble, they have car trouble, and their toilets overflow. They may have an advanced degree, but their actual expertise was developed over a period of time because they needed experience. It’s not an overnight occurrence.

Most dentists have very little management training, usually one class or quarter of practice management in college. That’s why they can be poor business managers. I know very few doctors that went to college to be managers.

Most doctors prefer to be seeing their patients. That’s their craft. It’s what gets them up in the morning. The business and staff issues can be overwhelming for them.

Lies Staff May Tell the Doctor

On the financial side of the business, many doctors manage their finances by how much money is in their checkbook at certain times of the month. If by the 15th, funds aren’t where they should be, the dentist will sometimes start asking staff questions to find out what is going on. Let’s talk about this experience by examples;

Doctor: We are low on funds in the checking account, have patient statements been sent out?
Staff: Yes they have. (Over a month ago)
Doctor: Is all the insurance filed and current?
Staff member: It’s all current (except for the claims that haven’t been paid or followed up on which is usually the problem).
Doctor: Is recall being done? I noticed some openings in my schedule.
Staff member: Yes, so and so is doing it. (Well kind of).

I know this isn’t always the case, but I have found that many times it is. So, they don’t know whom to believe and get frustrated.

The Dentist and their Staff as a Team

Trust is huge. The doctor wants to know someone has their back. Staff are hired to support the doctor, as they can’t be everywhere.

But, staff problems are one of the most common sources of frustration to the doctor and dealing with the issues that come up eats up a lot of their time. This is one of the main reasons I am hired by dentists. You must have the right staff.

One of my clients purchased a practice and found the staff wouldn’t listen to him. He called me and said he let all of them go, except for one employee. He was in a new town with a new practice and one employee. Imagine his stress level. We hired staff, filled the positions and together grew a million dollar practice in a town of 5,000 people. He sold his practice and many of the same staff are still there today.

We need to take care of our health care practitioners, so they aren’t so stressed from the day to day handling of their business. We need their attention freed up to take care of their patients, the best way to do this is by hiring and developing the right staff.

About Nena:
Nena Price is the owner of J.M. Price Consulting, a boutique consulting group dedicated to helping doctors grow and develop their practice and increase the bottom line. She is also a dental practice administrator and has worked in the trenches of practices to help bring out the best in their staff and create an exceptional experience for the patient. She is based in Glendale, California and can be reached at nena@jmpriceconsulting.com or her website: jmpriceconsulting.com.