

A close-up photograph of four human fingers, each with a simple black line drawing of a face. The faces have different expressions: the leftmost has a slight smile, the second has a neutral expression, the third has a slightly downturned mouth, and the rightmost has a neutral expression. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green.

ARE YOU CONTRIBUTING TO TEAM CONFLICT?

MEMBER ARTICLE |
BY KRISTI ABRAHAMSEN, DAADOM

Everyone knows that conflict in a dental practice can be the demise of a great team. When you have staff who aren't getting along, performance and productivity will inevitably suffer. Most leaders can quickly point out the "bad apple" of the team. But as leaders, do we ever look to see how our own actions unintentionally contribute to the problem? Here are four things all managers need to consider.

1. YOU IGNORE THE WARNING SIGNS

If a team member is unhappy, it is important to immediately address it. Avoid assigning excuses to the negative behavior such as, "don't worry about it. Susan is always stressing and complaining". Otherwise, you have given permission to continue with the negative behavior and risk spreading it to the rest of the team. Any concerns or feedback moving forward will be more readily dismissed by others.

The "it has always been that way" type of mentality is accepting of poor performance behaviors. Just because it's been that way for a long time does not mean it shouldn't be addressed and corrected.

2. YOU FAIL TO STOP BAD BEHAVIOR

Being disrespectful to each other or someone not pulling their weight in the practice are two examples of bad behavior that must stop immediately. Having difficult conversations with team members can be challenging for some leaders; enough that the problem is swept under the proverbial rug. This will be the fastest way to create resentment in your practice. Other team members will see you as a weak leader or favoring the poor performers.

These underachievers also are

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taught that they can escape accountability and consequences. They begin to do "just enough" to ensure they don't get in trouble, but there is nothing to push them to do better either. And why should they? They have avoided consequences and aren't rewarded for performing above expectations. It's a lose-lose situation.

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3. YOU FAIL TO SET CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

When defining a team member's expectations and practice needs, start with the basic Who, What, When, and Where definitions.



MEET THE MEMBER

Kristi Abrahamsen, DAADOM serves as the President of the AADOM Bay Area, CA Chapter. Since 1991, she has been in multiple capacities for both orthodontic and pedodontic specialties. Kristi is an RDH in her home state of California and currently leads a multi-location and multi-doctor team as Office Manager for Gila C. Dorostkar, DDS Pediatric Dentistry in the San Francisco Bay Area.

This breakdown will allow you to hold people accountable for their actions. If you are transparent in your expectations, you will hear fewer excuses like "I didn't know I needed to do that" or "I thought that was someone else's responsibility."

Put the expectations in writing. When we train a new clinical team member on the process and protocols, I have them sign off on each step, acknowledging that they understand how to do the task correctly and it is part of their job description. It also allows me to refer back to it if an employee states they were not aware of the task, as I will have the signed acknowledgment in their employee file.

4. YOU TREAT EVERYONE THE SAME

What??? Shouldn't everyone be treated equal? Yes, to an extent. Everyone should enjoy their work in a safe environment. However, everybody IS different. Some team members may be parents and need work flexibility to care for their children. Others may be career overachievers and are

always looking to grow within the practice. Some may be completely happy in their current role. Others are private and need one-on-one conversations, while others speak their mind to anyone who will listen.

Because everyone is different, treat them that way. Take the time to develop relationships with your team members and learn about their individual needs. Expecting the dental practice to take center stage in your team member's lives is a stretch. It may work for some, but it won't work for others. Discovering the proper balance will be a tough hill to climb, but once you get to the top, your team's motivation will drive the team culture to be more positive and successful.

As dental leaders, we must always be on the lookout for any issues that could cause team conflict, including our own actions. Learn to avoid being a conflict contributor and strive to be a team problem-solver! ■



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