

Substandard to Significant! 4 Management Strategies to Raise Team Performance! | by Judy Kay Mausolf

Have you ever felt like you were banging your head against a brick wall trying to get certain team members to perform? Their highest aspirations were to just get by or be just good enough! Well, if you have felt this frustration you are not alone. Substandard performance has become more of an epidemic than a scarcity. I have found that it most often arises when there is a lack of clear management. I offer dentists and their managers four management strategies that create clarity and make the biggest impact on performance: United Leadership; W.O.W. Decision Making; W.O.W. Delegation; and Performance Dialogue. These will raise performance levels by creating better results, better relationships, and more responsibility!

United Leadership

United Leadership is the most important strategy. Without it, performance expectations will be ambiguous and the team will conform to whatever are the lowest standards or expectations. United Leadership starts with getting the leadership team—what I refer to as the We Team—aligned. The We Team is made up of all owner/partner doctor(s), as well as the practice administrator (PA).

I suggest that We Teams schedule weekly We Team meetings. The PA becomes the designated point of entry to the We Team. The practice's team members are to bring all questions, requests or concerns to the PA, who will then share them at the We Team Meeting. The We Team will discuss and come to a decision or solution. The PA then meets with team member(s) in a timely manner to share the We Team's decisions or solutions with the team member(s). The end result is a unified message from the We Team!

W.O.W. Decision Making

Having a defined decision-making strategy is second. I coach We Teams to use what I refer to as W.O.W. Decision Making. W.O.W. is an acronym for "weed out weeds". A weed is anything that destroys a relationship, or makes a patient feel unwelcome or uncomfortable. W.O.W. Decision Making gives the We Team



a positive, practical and proven decision-making strategy. The results are decisions that are consistent, fair and that support the team, the patients and the practice.

W.O.W. Decision Making is based on the following four fundamentals:

- 1. Patients & Practice!** What is in the best interests of the patients and the practice, not just any single individual (including doctors)?
- 2. Practical!** What makes common sense? (chances are you will have to explain your decision, so it must make sense)
- 3. Precedence!** What precedent is being set? If it is done once for one team member, it becomes the expectation for the entire team. If it is not across the board, it will feel like favoritism or inconsistency and, therefore, it will

be unfair. Only say "yes" to what you want to set as a precedent.

4. Passion! Is the We Team passionate enough about the decision to defend it—even to the point of possibly losing a patient or a team member? I suggest not implementing anything that the We Team just thinks of as "nice to do"! "Nice to do" won't be worth defending if the practice could lose a patient or team member.

"Less is more" is a great summation for decision making. Implement less and just do it!

W.O.W. Delegation

Third is W.O.W. Delegation, which will help to create clarity with training, expectations and communication. W.O.W. Delegation gives the We Team a positive, practical and proven delegation strategy, resulting in clearly defined objectives that support the team, the patients and the practice. There are five steps to W.O.W. Delegation.

- 1.** Clearly state what you want or expect. Go deep enough to explain who, what, when, where, why, and how. We get so busy and in a hurry...we dump and run and do what I refer to as a flyby. Teams that take the time to communicate avoid flybys and create clarity, which results in raising the level of performance.

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Judy Kay Mausolf, owner and president of Practice Solutions, Inc., is a dental practice management coach, speaker and author with expertise in communication and team relationships. She coaches dentists and managers who want to be better leaders, to get their teams to work together better and to ultimately grow their practice. Judy Kay is President of National Speakers Association Minnesota Chapter (2012-13), and a member of the National Speakers Association; Academy of Dental Management Consultants; Speaking Consulting Network; and she is an Advanced Transformational Trainer™.

Contact Judy Kay at **612-701-4922** or **JudyKay@PracticeSolutionsInc.net**, or visit **www.PracticeSolutionsInc.net**.

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2. Ask the receiver of the task if they have any questions.
3. If it is more than one step, write it down in bullet point objectives.
4. If it is a longer project, schedule check-in times (no, this does not mean that you do not trust them...it means that you want to be informed and supportive).
5. Discuss a realistic completion date and set the date. If you don't set a date, it will create unclear performance expectations. Without a completion date, it is not a goal, only a "nice to do someday"—a dream.

Taking the time to clearly delegate will escalate significant performance results!

Performance Dialogue

The fourth management strategy is Team Performance Dialogue. Team Performance Dialogue is a discussion the PA has with a team member when performance issues arise. Often when PAs don't see the results they desire from a team member, they tend to believe it is a behavior issue that warrants consequences. However, not all performance issues are behavior issues. Before a PA initiates any consequences, it is important to identify whether the team member's lack

of performance was truly a behavior issue or something else. Maybe it was lack of training, or unclear expectations, or a communication problem that caused the poor performance. Only behavior issues warrant consequences. It is critical to not just react to what you think it is, because you really don't know unless you ask. This is why it is so essential to have a Performance Dialogue—ask questions to understand the why behind the team member's lack of performance. PAs can eliminate many performance issues by simply asking questions. Start out by scheduling a time to meet with the team member. Ask questions to verify if:

- They have been adequately trained to do the task (training issue).
- They were clear on what was expected (expectations issue).
- They were clear on what was communicated (communication issue).

In many cases, the PA will find that it is a lack of training, expectations or communication that caused the performance problem. If any of these is the case, the ownership lies on the delegator and not the receiver of the task. If it is not a training, expectation or communication issue, then it is a behavior issue, and consequences are warranted.

It is important that the entire team knows what the consequences will be for behavior is-

sues. Knowing the consequences will clarify to the team what they can expect if they choose to cause behavior issues. Doctors and PAs often feel bad or stressed when they have to follow through with the consequences. Here is the bottom line: the team member chose the consequences by choosing their behavior.

I ask the teams I coach to come up with what they feel are fair consequences for behavior issues. The following four-step process is suggested by most teams.

1. Conversation between team member and source.
2. Verbal warning from PA to source (documented in employee file).
3. Written warning from PA to source (documented in employee file).
4. Termination from PA to source (documented in employee file).

The refreshing part is that in most cases consequences are not necessary because it is a training, expectation or communication problem and not behavior!

Implementing the 4 management strategies of United Leadership, W.O.W. Decision Making, W.O.W. Delegation and Performance Dialogue will be the biggest turning point in the direction of the PA's success—which is ultimately the team's success!

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