

## Eliminate Toxic Attitudes in Easy Steps

By Judy Kay Mausolf ©

*Attention all drama queens, pot stirrers and problem makers! This one's about you!*



Now for the rest of you that don't fit into the above three categories, think about your office for a moment. Do you have any team members with toxic attitudes? You know the drama queens, pot stirrers or problem makers who make everyone else's life miserable and yet are unapproachable. Well, you're not alone. Many offices struggle with toxic attitudes for lack of knowledge of what to do and for lack of understanding the total impact they can have on a practice. Toxic attitudes spider web out and can poison your team and your practice. They have a huge impact! That is unless the following aren't important to you. Factors such as open communication, patient experience, treatment acceptance, high performance, team work, enjoying your work day, lower stress, feeling happy, and of course a healthy bottom line just to name a few. Yet I can't tell you how many times I have heard, "but they are a great hygienist or a great assistant etc....I can't terminate them for only having a bad attitude. Oh really? Yes you can and you should!

Here are 4 easy steps to help you eliminate toxic attitudes in your practice. (Schedule at least 2 hours to have a team meeting regarding toxic attitudes.)

The **first step** to end toxic attitudes...don't allow them! At the team meeting talk about how toxic attitudes impact the office. Inform your team they will no longer be acceptable in the practice. Ask the team who would like to work in a toxic free environment? I coach teams and facilitate workshops nationwide. I have yet to see anyone who does not want to work in a toxic attitude free environment. However, if by chance someone disagrees, I suggest you thank them for their services, hand them their check and invite them to work somewhere else that supports toxicity!

**Step two** is to define what a toxic attitude looks like to avoid statements after like, "I didn't know it meant that!" Utilize a flip chart and have a team member write down all the ideas the team feels describes a toxic attitude. As a team vote on and agree what constitutes a toxic attitude in your office. After the meeting, take those ideas and put together a list labeled *Toxic Attitudes*, print it out, frame it and hang it in view of the team (locker room, lunch room, doctor office, etc). They are important to review whenever you hire someone new or whenever someone's behavior deems it necessary.

**Step three** is to establish consequences. Ask the team what they feel should be the consequences. Surprisingly enough many team members suggest harsher consequences than most doctors or managers expect. Have the team vote on it. The majority vote rules and is to be implemented as the standard of protocol. Many teams choose the following standard of protocol for toxic attitudes.

- Start with a supportive reminder by the team member witnessing the toxic attitude asking or reminding the offender to stop.
- If the toxic behavior continues, the witnessing team member is to inform the doctor/manager.
- The doctor/manager is to follow a one, two, and three you're out process.
- One is a verbal warning, two is a written warning, and three results in termination.

**Step four** is for the doctor or manager to actually follow through with the actions of the consequences. So often times we give warnings and don't follow

through with actions. A manager said she gave one employee eight warnings! She finally stopped because she knew she would never be allowed to follow through with the actions. The employee continues to display the same toxic behavior because there were no consequences. The rest of the team is now frustrated by the lack of accountability and has lost respect for the management team.

Having a standard of protocol created as a team will make it easier for the doctor/manager to follow thru with actions. Doctors and managers can sometimes feel like the bad guy when they have to carry out tough actions. No one likes to be the bad guy. Knowing the team supports the protocol and the consequences makes it easier for the doctor and manager to follow thru. It is amazing how well this works because now everyone on the team knows what is expected and what to expect.

Will it stop **all** the drama queens, pot stirrers or problem makers? No but it will stop the majority! Anyone knowing the consequences and still willing to challenge the standard of protocol not only has a toxic attitude they have their own agenda. A good team philosophy is for everyone on the team to support the team agenda instead of their own or they are welcome to join a different team.

In team surveys, one of the biggest frustrations team members have with management is their lack of creating accountability and holding everyone equally accountable. Having a standard of protocol for toxic attitudes will help to do just that. Now that the toxic attitudes are gone it's time to nurture a tremendous attitude!