

Five Performance and Accountability Standards to Help Your Team Soar

By Judy Kay Mausolf

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the benefits of creating clear standards and the consequences of having no standards
- Learn the R.I.S.E. implementation standard and how it can help your practice
- Identify key questions to help you establish conduct standards
- Know five W.O.W. standards of service

Take a moment and think about your team. Is there any drama, disorder or performance decline? Do any of the following team members sound familiar?

The Drama Lover

Kelly makes mountains out of mole hills. Any schedule changes result in meltdowns. If Kelly is missing an instrument from her cassette, instead of just going and replacing it, she wastes time complaining to everyone. She often gossips about one co-worker to another. Kelly believes life doesn't just happen, it happens to her! She always complains, whines, and criticizes about co-workers, patients, family and, for that matter, anyone that crosses their path. Her ongoing drama lowers team morale and distracts everyone from focusing on the patients and the practice.

The Chaos Creator

Sam's life is always in disarray. He's almost always late and has an excuse. He overslept because the alarm clock stopped working and he didn't replace it. Or he didn't allow adequate drive time because he didn't check the weather. Or he was late dropping off the kids at school. Sam's desk is a disaster, and he can't find any of the charts or paperwork he needs when he needs them. He's never prepared for meetings, and is always rushing around, stressed from trying to catch up. The team can no longer rely on him to do his job, and have lost trust and respect for him.

The Checked-out Employee

Georgia has been with the practice for 25 plus years. She was an exceptional employee the first 15 years, but her performance has been in a steady decline for the past ten. Georgia challenges any new ideas and refuses to adopt any change in standards or services. She often has an attitude of entitlement where she feels they deserve special treatment because of her longevity with the practice. This makes others afraid to approach her. She may refuse to attend team functions, morning huddles or team meetings, and refuses to put in extra time in a crunch or do what she considers menial tasks. Her attitude and behavior affects the entire team's performance level. The team starts to question why they don't have to adhere to standards if Georgia doesn't.

If you recognize any of these employees or their bad habits, you're not alone. Many offices struggle with undesirable behaviors – they don't know what to do and don't understand the toxic

impact these behaviors can have on a practice. They affect communication, treatment acceptance, team work, work day enjoyment, stress levels, happiness, and more. Patient experience, team performance and the practice bottom line plummet. These behaviors are often triggered from unclear and inconsistent expectations. When you fail to set standards, these behaviors escalate.

Standards help eliminate the drama of who is right or wrong, clarify expectations and get everyone rowing at a higher level on the same boat. Every team member comes from a different background with unique and individual experiences. What they believe to be true is shaped by their personal experiences. These experiences create their personal truths, which is how they judge what is right and wrong. Drama, disorder and declining performance surface when there are different expectations of right and wrong.

In this chapter, we will spotlight five performance standards to create clear expectations and empower your team to soar.

Number One: Model the Waddle

In other words walk the walk! If leaders don't lead by example, it is next to impossible to create clear standards and raise the performance level. How can anyone trust and follow a leader who says one thing, but does another? Everything really does come from the top down. Set standards. Then live and maintain them.

If leaders want their team's focus to be the best interests of the patients and the practice, theirs must be as well. When leaders don't model the waddle, the team may lose trust that their leaders are doing the right thing, or that they even know what they're doing, and will stop following their lead. The leader's vision will falter when their team loses trust or respect for them. This may result in drama, disorder and declining performance.

Leaders must:

- Be willing to roll their sleeves up and work together
- Make sure what they're asking of their team makes common sense and is in the best interests of the patients and the practice
- Follow office rules just as closely as they expect everyone else to follow them. If they don't, their team may become angry and stop supporting them in other ways
- Look closely at their own behavior and avoid doing things for which they criticize the team

Number Two: R.I.S.E. Implementation Standard

Imagine your team has just returned from attending awesome courses at the ADA Annual Meeting. They are all jazzed up about implementing the latest and greatest new ideas they just learned. The first team meeting is data dump of information with expectations for the team to get on board and implement the new ideas immediately. The problem is the team meeting lasted only 45 minutes. Maybe an hour was scheduled but by the time everyone was in attendance only 45

minutes were available. This left time to only just mention each new idea because there were so many to cover. When patients started arriving for their afternoon appointments, the meeting was adjourned without deeper discussion. Sound familiar?

Many dental practices struggle to successfully implement new ideas because they lack an implementation standard. The R.I.S.E. implementation standard has four steps to help the team implement and sustain new ideas. R.I.S.E. is an acronym that stands for:

Review

Implement

Sustain

Evaluate

Review

Have a team meeting and keep it simple by introducing only one new idea at a time. The remaining ideas will be set aside in a parking lot to be addressed as time allows or at a later date in order of priority as voted by the team. For example, let's say you decide you want to start using intraoral cameras on hygiene patients. Review what you are currently doing and decide how it benefits the patient and the practice if you implement this change. It is important that the benefits of the change outweigh the pain and discomfort of implementation. Discuss with the team if it is realistic to implement the new idea with the available time, equipment, team, training, etc. If not, address any roadblocks. Once they have been addressed, you are ready for the next step: implement.

Implement

This is the step many dental teams don't discuss in detail. They need to allow adequate discussion and training time for implementing a new process. The first step is to clearly define the protocol or procedure. The next step is to discuss and answer the following questions:

- What is it?
- Who does it?
- Who is it for?
- Why is it done?
- When is it done?
- Where is it done?
- How is it done?

For example:

- What is it? Using intraoral cameras on hygiene patients.
- Who does it? The hygienists will take images with the intraoral cameras.

- Who is it for? All new patients to establish a baseline, as well as existing patients who have unfinished treatment, new hard and soft tissue concerns, or who need baseline photos.
- Why is it done? Patients will receive better diagnostics and enhanced patient care. This may lead to increased case acceptance and a healthier bottom line.
- When is it done? The roll-out date for this project is September 19, 2016. The images will be taken during the hygiene appointments of new and existing hygiene patients.
- Where is it done? In the hygiene operatory.
- How is it done? Hygienists will use the intraoral camera to examine the mouth during the first 20 minutes of the appointment. They will capture images that fit the criteria outlined above. They will review the images with patient and also have them up on the screen for the doctor to view when he or she comes into the room for the exam.

In preparation for the implementation of this project, the team will practice verbal skills, role playing and conduct a physical walk through to remove any unseen obstacles. Establish standard operating procedures for using the intraoral camera. Create a written document listing what, who, when, where, why and how and add the document to your performance manual.

Sustain

Many teams often drop the ball on this step. They implement the new idea for a short time and when things get chaotic they go back to the way they did the task in the past. The lack of follow through is often not addressed.

Success in sustaining a new idea starts with being consistent. For example, in the intraoral camera scenario above, taking pictures on three out of five patients that fit the criteria is not good enough. If the protocol is not being implemented every time, remind the team member in a supportive manner. It is necessary to continue to remind the team any time the protocol is not being followed. Old habits die hard and we all need an occasional reminder.

Continue repeating the process until it becomes a habit. The time it takes to learn something new to the time it becomes a habit is the transition period. The average time of a transition period is 66 days. Precise and consistent repetition helps to shorten the transition period. Whenever we implement something new, there is a learning curve that may feel awkward or uncomfortable. Remind the team that the discomfort is temporary.

Evaluate

Schedule regular check-ups. Dedicate quarterly team meetings - in addition to regular monthly team meetings - to discussing what is working and what is not with your current systems and protocols. Allow a minimum of two hours for the meeting.

Number Three: Conduct Standards

Even the best team members can lose their way in all the noise and hubbub of the day-to-day stresses. Establishing conduct standards will help the entire team keep on track even in the most stressful situations.

Conduct standards are really about thinking before reacting. Behaviorally, it means testing decisions and planned activities for integrity before implementing them. If you have not yet documented your practice's core values, decide what's important to you and write them down. Distribute them to your staff before sitting down together to create conduct standards so they'll have time to review them. Your conduct standards will largely support the core values of your practice.

Here are six questions to help your team create conduct standards:

- Is it legal?
- Does it align with the practice core values?
- Will we be comfortable and guilt-free if we do it?
- Would we do it to our family and friends?
- Would we be okay with someone doing it to us?
- Would the most ethical person we know do it?

Schedule a team meeting for at least three to four hours to establish conduct standards for the practice. You may choose to enlist the help of a coach to facilitate a positive and effective meeting. Start the meeting by reviewing the practice's core values. Ask the entire team to share how, when and where they feel the core values are not being supported.

Use a large easel pad and markers to write down all the concerns being shared. Discuss the breakdowns that are happening. What current behaviors support the core values? What current behaviors sabotage the core values? The behaviors you list that support the values, as well as the necessary changes, become your new conduct standards. It is very important for the leadership team to be willing to lead by example on whatever is established as the conduct standards

Here are examples of some conduct standards:

- Model the waddle you want to see from the team
- Set and maintain high standards – don't allow double standards
- Support a no gossip culture
- Communicate openly, honestly, and respectfully to each other and to patients
- Treat patients and each other how you want to be treated
- Resolve conflict by going directly to the source the same day if possible
- Take ownership, follow through, and be accountable for your mistakes
- Support each other and hold each other accountable to the practice's standards for behavior, communication, attitude and service

Number Four: W.O.W. Service Standards

W.O.W. is an acronym for "weed out weeds." Dental practices often offer wonderful amenities like warm towels, aromatics and massage chairs to entice new patients and retain existing patients, but fail to see the weeds they have growing in their office. A weed is anything that can

make the patient feel unwelcome or uncomfortable and damage the relationship. Implementing the W.O.W. service standard will give the team a way to think differently, act differently and make healthy decisions regarding the service they provide to their patients. Service is based on one simple question: What kind of experience am I creating for my patient?

Think about the first impression you make with your new patient, such as the new patient phone call, welcome packet or first check-in experience. Does it truly welcome patients to your practice? Or are you creating a weed experience where patients feel unwelcome?

The first step in setting W.O.W. service standard for your office is to start by reviewing your current systems and protocols. Ask yourself what's in it for the patient? If the system or protocol benefits only the practice and not the patient, chances are it is a weed. You can pull the weed by changing the system or protocol to make sure it also benefits the patient.

Every time you interact with a patient ask yourself the following questions to avoid creating a weed experience:

- Did I nurture the relationship?
- Does the system or protocol make sense for the patients and the practice?
- Does the system or protocol set the appropriate expectations and set a precedent the practice can consistently support?
- Does the system or protocol make them feel welcome, comfortable and build a relationship?

If you can't answer yes to all of these questions, you may be creating a weed experience.

Here are five W.O.W. service standards you can implement in your practice:

1. Be Happy to Serve

- Warm and friendly greeting
- Build relationships
- 5 Ps in every interaction
 - Positive
 - Prepared
 - Professional
 - Polite
 - Patient oriented

2. Be Consistent

- 5 out of 5 times
- Pay attention to details
- Be timely
- Be likeable
- Practice verbal skills, role playing and physical walk through

3. What's In It for the Patient

- Focus on the patient's experience
- Show care and concern
- Address complications
- Show appreciation

4. Work Together as a Team

- Be professional
- Have good conduct
- Have clear expectations
- Support each other
- No gossip
- Own it - if it is legal, ethical and within your licensure, it is your job
- Have some fun

5. Create an Awesome Ambiance

- Use the five senses - what do the patients see, hear, touch, smell and taste?
- Avoid weeds - anything that would make them feel unwelcome, uncomfortable, or possibly destroy the relationship.
- Maintain a sparkling clean environment where everything has its place

Number Five: Team Commitment Standard

It is necessary for every team member to be committed to supporting the practice standards in attitude, words and actions. The goal for the leadership team is to marry their team with their vision and core values for the practice. Address any obstacles and concerns whenever the team is asked to implement something new or change an existing standard, system or protocol. Inform the team that this is their opportunity to speak and invite them to share or forever hold their peace. Otherwise, the expectation is that they have no right to talk about it later in any way that is not positive or supportive.

Three Steps to Team Commitment

1. Choose a team meeting setting where everyone or most everyone can be in attendance.
2. Address any concerns or obstacles.
3. Ask each team member to verbally commit their support in front of the team. Verbal commitment helps prevent team members from grumbling later to their co-workers that they didn't agree, but they just did not say anything. You may want to use a phrase such as, "I commit to support _____ in my attitude, words and action."

There will be times when a team member is not supporting the standards. Review the standards with the team member and discuss where they are falling short. Together create an action plan to address any areas of concern. It is important for every team member to understand that it is necessary for them to support the practice standards in words, attitude and actions to be a part of the team. If you allow one team member to not support the practice standards, you sacrifice the entire team's performance. The bottom line is that if they are not supporting the standards, they are sabotaging the practice.

Summary

Implementing these five standards will help transform a team from drama, disorder and declining performance into a team that soars.

Contributor Biography