

PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

Staff Problems: Proficiency or Attitude

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Managing staff is one of the top three issues on just about every eye doctor's survey of office problems.¹ It often is number one. When you consider the average doctor spends more time at work than at home, it becomes clear why this is such an important issue. We have to learn how to work together effectively and productively. Let's see if we can simplify this complicated issue. Let's reduce all staff problems into one of two categories: proficiency issues or attitude issues.

Proficiency Issues

Proficiency issues are primarily education and training problems. We have a problem because we didn't educate or train the staff member properly. The staff member made a mistake. Someone had to fix the mistake. Rather than getting upset, stand back and simply ask if the problem could be resolved through education and training.

First, and most importantly, did the staff member receive adequate education and training originally? Often this is the problem. We assume staff will know

the right thing to say or the best way to handle a situation when this is not the case at all. If we did not provide appropriate training in the area where the ball was dropped, then this fix needs implemented as soon as possible to make sure all staff members have appropriate education and training.

Second, was the staff member proficiency tested at the end of education and training? It is not unusual for doctors to assume that simply because a staff member was exposed to education or training that learning occurred. Anyone who has worked in the educational

arena knows this is not true. You must verify that learning occurred. The best verification involves a "show me" approach. We can talk about swimming, but it is only when you enter the water do we find out if you can swim or not.

Third, do you have an ongoing random proficiency testing program? It's not enough to proficiency test once in a staff member's career. An ongoing

proficiency testing program will make sure skill levels stay high. An adage that has proven itself true over time is "people don't always do what you expect, but they always do what you inspect."

Attitude Issues

Attitude issues can be summarized by the statement: "I don't want to do the job." Some people just don't want to do the job they are assigned to do. The reason is not important, the attitude is. If your office is large enough that you can shift this person laterally to another post where they want to do the job, then you may be able to save them. If you cannot, then the best approach is to sever your relationship – today.

Today is important. If you do not sever the relationship today, staff members with attitude issues

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will damage your practice. They will negatively affect staff morale. They will sabotage patient treatment plans. Nothing good ever comes from keeping staff members with an attitude problem on board. It's better to let them go and replace them with a temporary employee from an agency than it is to keep them in the practice.

Begin to use this approach in your office with staff issues. The next time a staff problem occurs, take a

step back and ascertain if the issue is a proficiency problem or an attitude problem, then act accordingly. This approach can help you find the best solution for you, your patients, your staff and your practice.

Reference

1. Thal L. Business aspects of optometry. 3rd ed. Saint Louis, MO: Elsevier, 2010, p 199.

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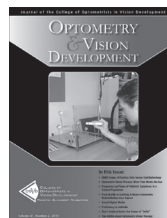
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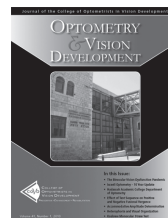
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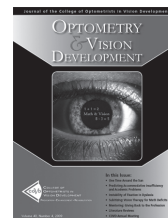
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