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Taking Your Ortho Practice in a SMART Direction

by **Daphne Souch**

As an orthodontic practice consultant, I'm regularly asked - by doctors and managers - for advice on a variety of issues. Most queries involve specifics on in-office training procedures and programs. However, one question that comes up again and again is, "What is the secret to attracting and retaining high quality, motivated employees?" Some of them tell me that they've tried incentives such as bonuses, raises, spa days, and even trips; but nothing seems to be working.

Being the problem solver that I am, I set out to find the answer. I began my investigation by identifying the practices with the highest records of long-term employee retention. Not surprisingly, these were also very successful practices. Next, I surveyed the owners of these practices in an attempt to determine a common denominator. Why were these owners successful in attracting and retaining motivated employees? What were they doing differently?

One thing that stood out was that every single one of these successful practices placed a high priority on conducting regular employee performance reviews. Could it be that simple?

Further investigation revealed that some of the practices with higher employee turnover were conducting annual performance reviews too. I'm sure you're all too familiar with the type: forms are filled out, boxes are checked, there's a brief discussion and, barring any major problems, the employee is given a raise. This works well for the employee, but what's in it for the owner of the practice besides higher overhead?

Here's the key difference: the practices that were most successful at employee retention and motivation had

incorporated a performance plan into their review process that included assigning individual goals designed to dovetail with the doctor's practice plan. Furthermore, employees in these practices were also encouraged to participate in all aspects of the employee assessment framework, from the development of the review model, to planning and goal setting.

My survey findings revealed that when employees have individual goals, they not only strive to achieve them, but they also gain a better understanding of how they contribute to the overall success of the practice. What's more, when specific individual goals are set, employees tend to become more focused on finding ways to work smarter and more efficiently.

A well-designed employee performance review should include four basic components: an overall evaluation of how the employee has performed during the assessment period, objective and relevant feedback, goals that identify key objectives, and a plan that outlines

how these objectives will be met. While all components are equally important, goal-setting is perhaps the most challenging. The key is ensuring that the goals are SMART - specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-based.

Specific: Specific goals define who, what, where, when, and why. What will be accomplished? Which team members will be involved? What actions are required? Why is this goal important to the individual and to the



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practice?

Measurable: How will goals be measured? What data will be used? Who will be responsible for collecting and analyzing the data?

Achievable: Are the goals realistic? Goals that are too easy or too difficult fail to motivate. If goals include skill development or learning new procedures, what training and learning opportunities will be offered?

Relevant: How do the goals relate to the individual as well as the practice plan? What are the objectives, and will successful goal accomplishment achieve those objectives?

Time-based: What is the specific time line? Is the time line realistic? Complex goals should be broken down into steps or increments, with defined deadlines for each step.

Yes, this all takes time. But continually advertising for, interviewing, hiring, and training new employees takes time too. Assessments that include meaningful feedback and SMART goals are both productive and rewarding for employees and employers. As an added bonus, the data collected through regular, in-depth employee performance reviews can provide

a wealth of information that will help grow the practice and allow informed decision-making on management systems, productivity, human resources, fiscal matters, and patient care.

Take your practice in a smart direction by utilizing SMART goals to increase employee retention, productivity, and individual commitment to the practice. ◊

About the Author



Daphne Souch is an orthodontic practice consultant, and has been in the orthodontic industry for more than 30 years. Her extensive experience in the field has given her a wealth of knowledge specifically pertaining to the areas of clinical assisting, treatment coordinating, and office management.