Clear the Clutter and Get Your Team Back on Track!

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Dentists and managers have enough on their plates without having to deal with the 3rd grade pettiness of drama, negative attitudes, gossip and conflict! What I refer to as *Clutter* because it creates confusion and disorder and impedes the team from focusing on what is really important ...the *Patients* and the *Practice*! If clutter is left unchecked the team and practice performance plummet.

Doctors and managers often believe that clutter comes from having the wrong team member(s) on board. When in many cases I have found it is not the wrong team member(s) but instead a lack of clear communication and clear leadership that causes the clutter. Without clear communication and clear leadership the team becomes confused and unsure of what is expected. They often end up reacting to a situation negatively because of a knee jerk reaction to how they feel at the moment. Their negative emotional reaction is the clutter (drama, negative attitudes, gossip or conflict). Clutter happens because there is no standard of behavior or expectation of performance stating what is and what is not acceptable and appropriate. Therefore, the chance to make good things happen, like better results, better relationships, and more responsibility disappear in the clutter.

You CAN "Clear the Clutter" and get your team back on track!

HERE ARE 5 CONCEPTS THAT WILL HELP YOU CLEAR THE CLUTTER IN YOUR PRACTICE:

ALIGNED LEADERSHIP

It starts with clear leadership! Clear leadership comes from 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. I suggest We Team's schedule weekly We Team meetings. The practice administrator becomes the designated point of entry where the team brings all questions, requests or concerns. They are to share the questions, requests or concerns at the We Team Meeting. The We Team discusses and come to a decision or solution. The practice administrator shares the We Team decision or solution with the team member(s).

W.O.W. DECISION MAKING

Clear leadership also comes from having a clear decision making strategy. 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 does not benefit the patients and the practice. 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 support the team, the patients and the practice.

W.O.W. Decision Making is based on the following concept questions:

- **Patients & Practice!** What is in the best interests of the patients and the practice and not any individual (including doctors)?
- **Practical!** What makes common sense?
- **Precedence!** What precedence is being set — in other words can it be done for everyone or just this one time? If it is done once for one person it becomes the expectation for everyone or it feels inconsistent and unfair.
- **Passion!** Is the We Team passionate enough about the decision to defend even to the point of possibly losing a patient or a team member? If the We Team is contemplating implementing something they think is just a "nice to do", don't implement it. They won't be willing to stand behind it.

The next step in clearing clutter and getting the team back on track is creating clear performance expectations!

When we don't see the results we desire from a team member we get frustrated and tend to believe it is a behavior issue that warrants consequences. However, before we take any action we need to identify whether their lack of performance was truly a behavior issue. Maybe it was an issue with training, expectation, or communication that caused the problem. It is critical to not just react to what you think it is because you really don't know. This is why it is so essential to meet with the team member and ask questions. The reality is that we could clear the majority of our clutter problems if we just asked questions.

Schedule a time to meet with the team member and ask them questions to verify if:

- They have been trained to do the task
- They were clear on what was expected
- They were clear on what was communicated

In many cases you will find it is either a lack of training, expectations or communication and not behavior that causes the performance problem. If that is the case the ownership lies on the delegator and not the receiver of the task.

W.O.W. DELEGATION

W.O.W. delegation clears clutter by creating clear training, expectations and communication.

- Clarify 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 what I call, a flyby. Teams that stop doing flybys get less clutter!
- Ask the receiver of the task if they have any questions.
- If it is more than one step write it down in bullet point objectives.
- If it is a longer project, schedule check in times (no this does not mean you do not trust them — it means you want to be informed).
- Discuss a realistic date to complete and set a date. If you don't set a date it will create unclear performance expectations. Without a date it is not a goal, it's only a dream.

Detailed job descriptions clear clutter by creating clarity in training and performance expectations. Don't let the fear of missing something stop you from using job descriptions. You can avoid the phrase, "it's not my job", by adding the following statement to all job descriptions:

Your job, from the moment you clock in to the moment you clock out, is whatever is Legal, Ethical and within your Licensure to help the practice flow!

I suggest reviewing it whenever you are hiring someone new, performing a performance review, or whenever behavior/attitude deems it necessary.

Creating a priority hierarchy also clears clutter by clarifying performance expectations on when to do what. I utilize the rocks, pebbles and sand analogy. A rock is anything that is important and urgent (needs to be done that day) or there will be negative consequences for the practice. The biggest rock is always the patient right in front of you. Everyone helps everyone with their rocks (as long as it is legal, ethical and within their licensure) before going on to their own pebbles and sand. Once all rocks are completed the team member may move on to their pebbles.

Pebbles are also very important but not urgent. Pebbles are never delegated because they can be done another day without affecting the practice negatively. Everyone is responsible for their own pebbles. A pebble can eventually become a rock if left undone based

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on change in urgency. For example ordering supplies might become a rock if you must order that day or you will run out of necessary supplies before they arrive. Even washing uniforms may become a rock if there are none available for the next day and it is close to closing.

Sand is the filler to fill in open time with cleaning and organizing. Sand is never delegated. Everyone is responsible for their own. This helps to prevent delegating the things that are less desirable.

Cross training clears clutter and raises the level of performance by enabling team members to support each other. After all, the team is only as strong as its weakest link. It is imperative that everyone be trained to be A's or you divide the team and performance goes down. What I mean by trained to be A's is that everyone within a department is trained to the highest level. No longer will you have A, B and C level of performance team members. Everyone will be empowered to support everyone (*as long as it is Legal, Ethical & within their Licensure*) resulting in a win for the patients, the practice and the team!

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Giving team members the confidence and skill sets they need to resolve conflict clears clutter. It is essential that team members utilize these skill sets to resolve conflict. Having the following process helps to lessen the emotional energy spent on who did what wrong and instead focus on the future results and what can be done.

- Set up time to meet with the person with whom you have a concern or conflict (they may not have time right at the moment).
- Don't talk to anyone else about the conflict.
- Be open; don't come to the table with the solution, you don't know their reasons.
- Don't personalize; instead of saying you did this, say I am not sure what you meant by... or can we talk about what happened today?
- Listen calmly and believe what they tell you (or what's the point of the conversation?).
- Focus on the solution; what can be done to prevent reoccurrence in the future versus who did what wrong? It will not be perfect for anyone, but it can be good for everyone.
- If you can't resolve; all team members involved meet together with whoever handles conflict resolution and agree on a solution.
- Believe your team members have positive intent; old habits die hard, they may need a few reminders before the new attitude, behavior, or system stick.

CONSEQUENCES

Sometimes no matter how clear the We Team is with training, expectations and communication, the clutter won't go away. Then it is a behavior issue and a behavior issue warrants consequences. Having a clear understanding that there are consequences for inappropriate or negative behavior will help prevent clutter. Knowing what the consequences are also tends to inhibit or stop negative behavior and instead motivates positive and healthy behavior. Consequences, in essence, clarify what's in it for the team member(s) to not create clutter. I ask the teams I coach to come up with what they feel are fair consequences for their practice. This four step process is suggested by most of my teams.

1. Conversation between team member and source of clutter (behavior issue).
2. Verbal warning from practice administrator to source of clutter. (documented in employee file)
3. Written warning from practice administrator to source of clutter.
4. Termination from practice administrator to source of clutter.

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

Embracing these 5 concepts will help your team clear the clutter and get back on track to what is important — the patients and the practice! Helping your team Clear the Clutter may be the biggest turning point in the direction of their success which is ultimately the practice's success! ✿