



# ESTHETIC TEAM

THE WISDOM OF SHARED KNOWLEDGE



by Bobbi Anthony, R.D.H.

*Bobbi Anthony is the founder and owner of Comprehensive Care Consulting, Inc., in Mission Viejo, California. She offers a complete range of practice management, team-building, communication, and hygiene consulting services, helping good dental practices build the strategies necessary to become great cosmetic dental practices. Ms. Anthony consults and speaks internationally and is a regular presenter for Dr. Larry Rosenthal's Aesthetic Advantage in New York. She can be reached at 949-297-3828 or by e-mail at bobbi@bobbianthony.com.*

## Great Expectations

Hiring a new employee can be a time of great expectations and great stress. Staff turnover generally creates an increased workload for the entire team and costs the practice in a loss of productivity and time. The desire to "get it right this time" can be high and the whole team may have counted on finally creating their "Dream Team."

---

*Behavioral research suggests that there is a direct correlation between employees' expectations and their attitudes.*

---

As both the new employee and the employer share the same goal (creation of a successful working relationship), it is difficult to understand why positive attitudes and great expectations can soon disintegrate. What went wrong? Why did the relationship fail? Did the employee put on an act in order to be hired? Did the doctor and/or the office manager not give the employee enough information about the job description and duties? Somewhere along the way the relationship was damaged, and now both employee and employer fear that they will soon be starting over with the hiring process.

Unfortunately, great expectations too often go unmet because they were never clear and never spoken. Behavioral research suggests that there is a direct correlation between employees' expectations and their attitudes. Researcher

Chris Argyris originated the term “psychological contract” in his book *Understanding Organizational Behavior*.<sup>1</sup> Psychological contract refers to the employer’s and employee’s expectations of the employment relationship. This might also be defined as a set of ideals that each side believes they are entitled to as long as they have met the expectations of the other. This contract and the accompanying expectations operate over and above the formal contract of employment and many times are never directly verbalized.

Obviously, it can be difficult to meet an expectation that has not been verbalized. Behavioral researcher D.M. Rousseau states that since individual employees’ beliefs about their employment relationship can be subjective; and, since they may not even agree with the employer about what the actual contract was, it is not difficult to imagine that misunderstandings can lead to the belief that promises have been broken or the contract violated. Once the perception of violation has occurred, there can be feelings of deception and betrayal. And, therefore, trust is damaged and performance and behavior suffer.<sup>2</sup>

As an example, let’s consider that a new employee has been hired and that this employee appears well-suited for the position, has a great deal of experience, and is well-liked by both the team and the patients. The doctor and manager are very pleased with the employee’s work ethic and believe she is integrating well. After the first week the manager lets her know that she is doing a good job.

However, after three months a detectable change in attitude has occurred. Perhaps the employee is

arriving late to huddles, is slow at performing her duties and definitely is not displaying signs of teamwork. The doctor and/or office manager may now feel that they have misjudged this employee; it appears that she cannot be trusted to work independently, and other employees are now complaining about her unfriendly attitude toward them and the patients. The doctor may feel betrayed—time and money were spent to train this person, uniforms and monogrammed laboratory coats may have been purchased. Now, after all the time and money spent, it appears that this employee doesn’t really want to be a part of the practice.

---

*If, for some reason, an expectation cannot be met, it can still be helpful for an employee to understand why it is not possible at that time.*

---

Why would this team member begin with a positive attitude and behavior and then suddenly change? What expectations might this employee have had? Perhaps she needed more continual feedback on her job performance; or, perhaps, more structure. She may have felt ignored, overlooked, or taken advantage of. Additionally, she may have felt that she was working enthusiastically to meet the doctor’s expectations and had anticipated a performance review or even an increase in salary after the 90-day probationary period. Either way, there was a perceived violation or betrayal of the psychological contract on one—or perhaps both—sides. Once these violations have occurred it is difficult to rebuild

trust, and may lead to an increase in employee turnover.

Expectations can have a direct impact on the feelings, behaviors, and attitudes of employees and employers alike. However, studies reveal that communication of expectations is not the norm; it is more often the exception. Why aren’t expectations discussed more openly at the beginning of the employment relationship? Often it is because there is a lack of knowledge and understanding. Unfortunately, unmet expectations are more apparent and more easily identified *after* the damage has been done

Expectations can be spoken or unspoken, met or unmet. However, whether spoken or not, unmet expectations can contribute to poor performance and lower productivity, and lead to negative attitudes and increased turnover. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics has estimated that U.S. companies lose about \$3 billion dollars a year due to workplace negativity.

Inscape Publishing has developed a self-assessment to help individuals explore work expectations that may impact employment relationships:

- structure (clear instructions on what to do and how to do it)
- diversity (a desire to work with people from a variety of backgrounds with varied points of view)
- recognition (environment where hard work is acknowledged and rewarded)
- autonomy (independence or freedom to make decisions about how to do the job)

- environment (work environment to be conducive to their mental and physical health)
- expression (opportunity for expressing their identity and creativity)
- teamwork (expect collaboration to be highly valued)
- stability (job security and environment that remains relatively unchanged)
- balance (balancing both the personal and professional life)
- career growth (want to make progress toward career goals)
- compensation (fair pay that reflects their skills and responsibilities).<sup>3</sup>

By taking the time to identify specific work expectations and clearly communicate the needs of all parties concerned, both employee and em-

ployer expectations can be spoken, written, discussed, and managed. This is the first step toward increasing job satisfaction and improving job performance and productivity. The highest job satisfaction is derived from spoken and met expectations.<sup>3</sup> It is important to note, however, that if an expectation has been spoken, yet has gone unmet, the same feeling of a contract violation can occur. However, team members and doctors and managers speaking openly about needs may be the first step in developing trust and a positive attitude. If, for some reason, an expectation cannot be met, it can still be helpful for an employee to understand why it is not possible at that time.

The process of identifying and speaking about expectations allows doctors and managers to be more effective in developing and maxi-

mizing each employee's talents and skills. By making a continual effort to meet employee needs and expectations, doctors can develop a closer rapport and level of trust with their team members. And we all know that quality relationships and positive attitudes are good for teams and good for business!

#### References

1. Argyris C. *Understanding Organizational Behavior*. Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press; 1960.
2. Rousseau DM. Psychological and implicit contracts in organizations. *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal* (2):21-139, 1989.
3. *Work Expectations Profile, Self Assessment*. Minneapolis, MN: Inscape Publishing; 2001. 

