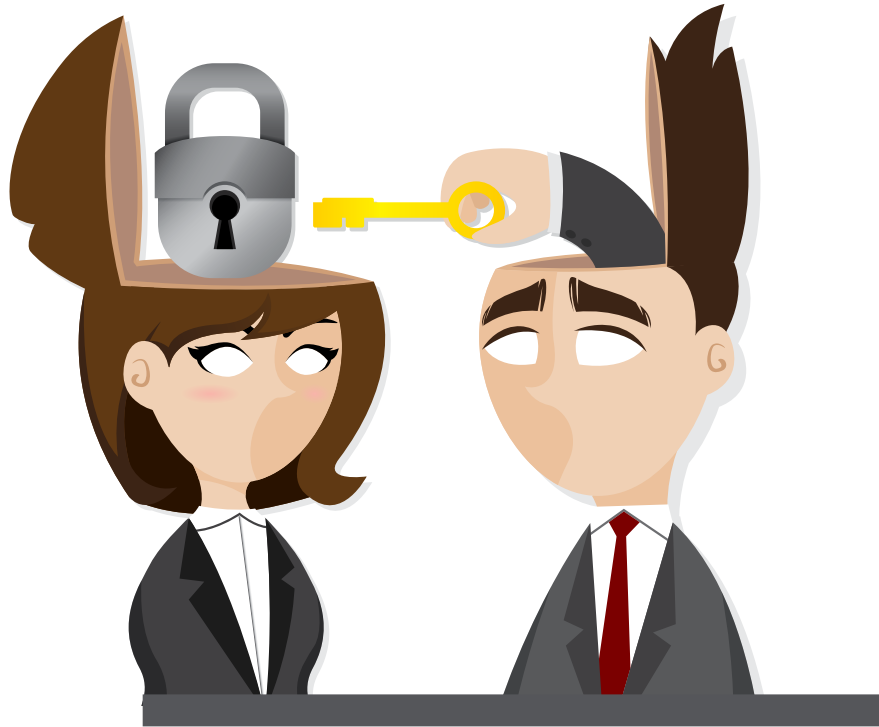


Solving the Problem

OF THE Underperforming Employee

by Rebecca Boartfield and Tim Twigg



"I hate to terminate employees!"

That's the understatement of the year; no one likes to do it. Not only is the termination itself difficult, you will have to recruit, interview, hire, and train a replacement, costing an emotional and financial toll. Plus, what if the person you hire turns out to be worse than the one you fired?

These stresses and/or fears can lead to management paralysis, meaning you put up with the poor performing employee for much longer than you should. Too many employers allow themselves to be held hostage by underperforming employees. And who wins? Nobody! Not you, not the employee, not your practice, and not your other good employees.

To figure out what's causing the performance issue, and to fix it, you first must understand what is contributing to the problem.

THE FIRST QUESTION:

Is it the employee or is it me?

The easy answer is always "the employee," but is that really true? The morale of your people often reflects your attitude. If you are unhappy, chances are they will be unhappy too. If you project a positive mental outlook,

they are likely to respond the same way. As any good leader would do, be willing to take a hard look at your role. Don't assume it is always your employee who is causing the problem.

THE SECOND QUESTION:

Why?

What is contributing to the poor performance or poor attitude (especially if the employee had a great attitude before)? Ideally, this would include having a conversation with the employee to focus on solutions for improvement. What if the solution is as simple as the need for training? To be clear, this is about being open to knowing what's truly going on and looking for constructive ways to move forward with a game plan solidly in place. In your conversation, listen for points of frustration, noting especially ways the employee reports s/he could be more adequately supported.

THE THIRD QUESTION:

Is this employee worth keeping?

This may be the most important question of all. Why bother trying to solve the problem if, in your gut, you don't want the person to stick around any longer?

Performance is a function of both ability and attitude. Ability is the person's own aptitude brought to the practice and is enhanced by the training and resources supplied by the organization. Attitude is a broad term and means different things to different people. When performance is poor as a result of attitude, it is usually the product of a person's lack of desire and commitment, both of which can be reflected in the person's overall motivation.

You can have someone with a great attitude who lacks ability; you can have someone with a bad attitude and great ability; and you can have someone who is perfectly balanced between the two.

Obviously, everyone wants the perfectly balanced employee. Which of the other two do you think creates the most problems? Without a doubt, it is the individual with the bad attitude, regardless of ability. With the right attitude, an employee who lacks ability has the potential to be trained and succeed. A bad attitude, on the other hand, may never be fixed, regardless of anyone's efforts.

People with low ability and/or poor attitude may have been poorly matched with the job in the first place. They may have been promoted to a position that's too demanding for them. Or maybe they no longer have the support that previously helped them to perform well. Whatever the reason, the individual either is not getting the job done or is getting the job done but with an unpleasant, disruptive attitude.

THERE ARE FOUR MAIN WAYS TO OVERCOME PERFORMANCE PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH A LACK OF ABILITY AND/OR POOR ATTITUDE:

Train/support

Focus on the resources provided to do the job. Does the employee have what s/he needs to perform well and meet expectations? Ask the employee for thoughts, ideas, and/or suggestions that will bring about improvement.

The result should be a well designed plan for going forward. It should begin with clarification of performance goals and/or expectations for improvement. It should then outline specific action items for performance assistance (based on what you learned from the employee) and potential solutions to bring about improvements such as resources and/or training. Finally, it should include a process for giving performance feedback so that everyone knows if this is working or not. Your feedback, as always, should be ongoing, timely, accurate, open/honest (not accusatory), and directly related to established goals.

Change job duties

Consider changing job duties where appropriate. Analyze the individual components of the work. Where is the individual specifically failing? Is this something that has to be done by this individual alone? Does it make sense to change a process or procedure to fit the individual in the position? Try different combinations of tasks in order to best match them to the individual's abilities.

This may involve rearranging the jobs of other people if it makes sense for other employees to take on those tasks. Be careful not to unload a bunch of work and then dump it on other team members just to avoid actively dealing with the poor performer. Your higher achieving employees will not take this well if they don't see something being done with the poor performer at the same time.

Your goal is to improve the poor performer and retain the employee, but you should not do this at the expense of other team members. These job duty changes should meet operational needs as well as provide meaningful and rewarding work to everyone involved.

Reassign

When changing job duties doesn't turn the situation around, consider reassigning the poor performer. If you use this option, make sure the reassigned job is still challenging and stimulating. This is not intended to be a punishment and it doesn't have to be a demotion; it could be a lateral move. In fact, it is recommended you don't use demotion as a punishment tactic within your organization. Remember, the employee's performance may not be intentionally poor; s/he may simply lack the skills for the position.

The idea behind reassignment should be a positive one. In a real sense, you can tell the employee that s/he is being reassigned in order to focus on what s/he does well, which is greatly appreciated and valued.

Termination

As a final option, you may need to let the employee go. It really should be a last resort after you've done due diligence to salvage the relationship and make it successful.

Sometimes training and support aren't enough to bring about change; sometimes there aren't appropriate opportunities for changing job duties or providing reassignment; and sometimes an employee's attitude never changes. In these cases, the best solution for everyone involved is for the employee to find work elsewhere.

Don't fall into the trap of being paralyzed by how to handle an underperforming employee. Through careful analysis of the problem, you may uncover a solution. Who knows? It might even bring about a change in you! By creating action plans and looking for ways to solve an abilities or attitude problem, you might create a lasting employee/ employer relationship that will be rewarding for everyone for many years to come. In any case, don't avoid your responsibilities as an employer to act on these problems and to bring about change within your organization, even if that means eventual termination. You can't afford to bury your head in the sand and hope for the best.



Tim Twigg is the President and **Rebecca Boartfield** is an HR Compliance Consultant for Bent Ericksen & Associates. For more than thirty years, the company has been a leading authority in human resources and personnel issues, helping

dentists successfully deal with the ever-changing and complex labor laws.

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FUN! Fact

Children begin to **develop their primary teeth** **six weeks after conception** while in their mother's womb.

One in every 2,000 babies is **born with a tooth.**

Ask the Consultant

Q: If the Doctor provides alprazolam (Xanax) to the patient at the office prior to their dental procedure, can we bill insurance?

A: There is no dental code for alprazolam. You can bill the insurance using code D9999 Unspecified Adjunctive Procedure with a narrative. However, I doubt any dental plan will cover it. The patient's medical insurance might cover it.

Q: When the lab provides a full contour zirconia crown cemented to a titanium base abutment for a screw retained restoration, do we use code D6065 Implant Supported Porcelain/Ceramic Crown with costs for both the abutment and implant crown? Or do we code and bill separately the Abutment as D6056 and Crown D6065?

A: Single Crowns, Implant Supported D6065 Implant Supported Porcelain/Ceramic Crown: A single crown restoration that is retained, supported and stabilized by implant.

It is an error to report the "abutment supported" code when in fact the restoration attaches directly to the implant body and does not have an abutment that connects the crown to the implant. Based on that, you would also bill D6056 Prefabricated Abutment.

Responses provided by **Kathleen Johnson**, President of Kathleen Johnson Consulting, Inc.

Quote-Worthy

“Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.”

— Thomas Edison



Updating Easy Dental

Over the next few Software Support Service Savvy articles, we will review the Trojan Update process for various integrated Practice Managements Systems. Trojan recommends running updates at least once a week for web downloads for any Practice Management System.

This month, we will look at updating Easy Dental over the web. When updating Easy Dental everyone can still be in Easy Dental but may not click on the Trojan viewer during the update process. The time it takes to download and process the updates will vary depending on internet speed, speed of computer, and the length of time since the last update. Trojan recommends weekly updates to keep download times at a minimum.

Downloading Trojan Benefits for Easy Dental

- Double-click the **Download Benefit Update** icon and your download will begin.
- The file transfer status screen will show the progress as each file is downloaded. The time remaining is indicated.
- When the download is complete, you will be prompted with a screen with two options.
- Click **Option 1) Click here to minimize this program.**
- This will minimize the Trojan Benefit Download program and allow you to update benefits in your Practice Management System.

Updating the Benefits in Easy Dental

The steps are minimal to updating your Easy Dental system.

- Double click the **Trojan Update Utility** icon.
- If you do not have this icon on the Windows desktop, then you can click **Start, Programs, Easy Dental Trojan Viewer #, Easy Dental Trojan Update Utility.** If you are unable to run the Trojan Data Update now, please call Software Support. **DO NOT DOWNLOAD A SECOND TIME!**
- When you have opened the Easy Dental Trojan Update Utility, click on **Database Update.** You will see a screen alerting you the database will be modified. Simply click on **OK** to continue.
- Be sure all computers are exited from the Trojan viewer and remain out for the entire update process.

- You will then be prompted to choose the location of your updates. In the Install Update from box, type the path of **"C:\tro"** then click on **OK** to proceed.
- The Easy Dental Insurance Update will immediately begin to process your update. You will see a series of events processing, beginning with Deleting Records. **DO NOT STOP THE UPDATE.**
- Do not interrupt the update process once it has started.
- Once the update is complete you will see a **Easy Dental Trojan Insurance Update Done!** Click on **OK.** Then click **File,** and **Exit** to exit from the Easy Dental Trojan Update. You have now completed updating your Practice Management System with the latest Trojan benefit plans.

Completing the Process

- Now that your Practice Management System has been updated you will need to finalize the Trojan Benefit Download Process.
- Click on the **Trojan Communicator** that was minimized and **Trojan Communicator** will close.
- You are now ready to select **Option 2) Click here only after you have processed the Trojan Update.**
- Confirm that you have processed the update by clicking **Yes.**
- The **Trojan Communicator** will close and the benefit files that were downloaded will be purged to free up space on your computer. If you were unable to process the downloaded files into your Easy Dental, do not download again before calling Trojan. You will have gaps in your data.
- The entire Benefit Download and Update process is now complete.

If you have any questions about updates for your office, please call Trojan's Software Support at 800-451-9723 ext. 1. We are here to help you Monday through Friday from 6am to 4pm PST.



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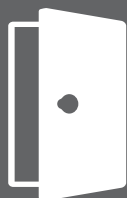
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Many times, due to someone's credit being affected, they will call and resolve their debt with us. Great customer service and affordable to use."

— Barbara W.



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