

Sandy Roth's

CommuniQue!

Unique and Challenging Concepts from ProSynergy Dental Communications

#172: *But that's the job*

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But that's the Job!

Several years ago, I visited with a practice that had made the decision to accept assignment of dental insurance. It was a conscious decision they had made and with which I had no issue or opinion.

A moment of digression to review this point. Many of you have heard me say that the decision to accept insurance assignment, like the decision to participate in dental plans, is (in my opinion) essentially a business decision, not a moral or even philosophical one. It is a business decision which must be made solely based on the level of risk the dentist is willing to accept.

It is risky to put portions of your cash flow in the hands of a third party with whom you have either no contractual relationship or little leverage. On the other hand, it can be risky to establish a payment policy which appears to be non-traditional or disadvantageous to the patient. Thus, each practice owner must make this decision on the basis of what they know

about their patient base, their tolerance for risk, and their ability to make strong connections with their patients. (For more information on this topic see the last page of this CommuniQue.)

Returning to the client..... During the visit, we had occasion to discuss the problems the team was experiencing. One member spent several minutes ranting, literally ranting, about the aggravation she experiences around dental insurance. Her complaints:

- ◆ she spends hours on death-defying hold when she calls insurance carriers
- ◆ the patients seem to think she is responsible for monitoring their insurance benefits
- ◆ the insurance carriers “lose” the claim forms and she has to re-submit them regularly
- ◆ it takes forever to get paid and it is a lot of work to set up and maintain an effective monitoring system
- ◆ the insurance carriers forward the checks

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to the patients who cash them and then don't pay their bills

- ◆ there is too much complicated paperwork and too many insurance carriers to monitor.
- ◆ she doesn't get to work directly with the patients very much and she is isolated in her office in the back.
- ◆ the job is boring and repetitious
- ◆ she often has to come in on Fridays to catch up and no one else has to do that

Now that is a list of complaints! This young woman was not making up any of these objections. They were all true for her. The problem was, however, that **she had been hired as the insurance clerk**. All of that was her job. She hadn't been hired to chit-chat with patients and entertain them socially. She had been hired specifically to handle insurance submissions and deal with the details to make sure the practice got paid as much as they were due as quickly as possible.

In essence, she was telling the dentist, her team mates and me that she didn't want to do the job she had been hired to do. Case closed.

Now, I wish this were unusual, but it is not. And while this is, perhaps, an extreme example of what I observe, it is more often the case than not. People are hired to perform

certain tasks or carry certain loads or provide certain services then complain about having to do what they were hired to do. Sometimes the complaints are overt, as with the example above, but more often they are more subtle.

While I do not encourage clients to create systems that depend on team members dialing for dollars (filling holes after cancellations, endless recall lists to manage, etc.), if the job is to fill cancellations or work the recall list, that is the job and the person or people hired to do this job must know that this is what they have been hired to do.

In many cases, the problem begins when the dentist and rest of the team are unclear themselves or fail to fully convey the specific nature of the position when hiring a person to carry out the tasks. It is understandable that people would be aggravated when given major assignments they would never have agreed to in the first place. In other cases, however, while they are clear about the specifics of the position, they fail to ensure that the candidate is prepared to carry out the obligations of the position. Do they have the organizational skills, the discipline, the tenacity, the attention to detail, the disposition, the patience and/or the proper mindset to get the job done?

Just recently, I attended a team meeting by speaker phone. One of the participants had been hired to assist the dentists, hygienists

and assistants in the clinical area. Her job was to set up each room, handle sterilization and instruments, do inventory and stocking, maintain the equipment, and insure that the physical plant was well-maintained. A very important job and one that required a lot of energy, enthusiasm, attention to detail, good judgment, and self-discipline. While she readily accepted the position, she was beginning to express her distaste for the actual job.

“Sometimes we run behind and I have to stay late and get everything set up for the next day. I don't think it is fair that I should have to stay late all the time and everyone else gets to go home.”

I asked about the solution she was proposing. Her reply: the assistants and hygienists should stay and set up the rooms for the following day. When I reminded her that setting up the rooms was a fundamental element of her position, not a job designed to be shared, she protested at the unfairness of the situation. She actually believed everyone else should be responsible for doing her job so she wouldn't have to “stay late.” I encouraged her to re-frame her thinking. Her job required her to stay until the rooms were set up for the following day so it was not an issue of staying “late.” It was an issue of doing her job.

I don't think she ever agreed with me on this matter; so, the dentist and rest of the team will have to decide whether they will continue to

employ someone who is expressing such resistance to doing the job she was hired to do.

Consider other expressions of a similar nature. Someone is hired to help patients make appointments then constantly complains about how much time it takes for patients to check their schedules, juggle other obligations and make a decision. Another is responsible for working out financial arrangements with patients but finds it often too much work or inconvenient to set aside other tasks to ensure that arrangements are clear. Or worse, this person is uncomfortable talking about money with patients or hates conflict.

The bottom line here is that while some jobs are distasteful to some people, others find them interesting, challenging and even fulfilling. While I might not enjoy the routine of contacting insurance companies to track down payments, others just love the challenge of getting those companies to pay and pay quickly. You must look for people who really want to do the job you need to have done rather than hope that a convenient candidate will eventually settle into a position for which they are not really suited or which they do not embrace.

These positions and their results are far too important to be left to people who do not want to do them, do not take them seriously or who lack the competencies necessary to do them well.