

## **THE CARE AND FEEDING OF A LONG-TERM EMPLOYEE**

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Efficient and productive orthodontic practices all have one thing in common - a team of professional employees that work together toward the common goals of the practice. The key is not only hiring the right people, but keeping them motivated and rewarding them along the way. One of the biggest challenges facing many orthodontic offices today is motivating employees to see orthodontics as a career choice, not a stepping stone to a bigger and better job outside our field. To do this, it is important to find out what motivates your staff and create a format where they can see the connection of performance tied with rewards. This is where employee performance reviews, on-going communication, and incentives are essential. The goal of this article is to encourage orthodontic teams to step back from their day-to-day operations and consider the keys to employee motivation and longevity.

Orthodontists seek to motivate employees to act in the office's best interest. The major role of motivation is to align the individual's interests with those of the practice. Many factors can affect an employee's motivation such as the employee's personality traits, the culture of the practice, and the general management style of the orthodontist.

In general, the objective of compensation is to tie the individual's and the organization's interests together by rewarding employees for actions that benefit the practice.

One of the orthodontist's most important tasks is to first design jobs and develop an environment that provides opportunity for growth and lead employees to satisfaction from doing their job. As part of this quest, an orthodontist may consider rewarding performance.

### **EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND REWARD SYSTEMS**

When an orthodontist has decided to reward performance, performance measurement systems should be in place to support the reward program. A systematic approach to rewarding performance has five broad attributes designed to motivate desired performance.

#### **#1 Understanding the Job**

First, the employees must understand their job and the reward system and believe that it measures what they control and contribute to the organization. This attribute ensures that the employee perceives the reward system as fair and predictable.

If employees do not understand their job or how to improve their performance, a reward system based on performance measure is ineffective. Employees perceive no relationship between effort and performance. Similarly, if the reward system is too complex, employees are unable to see the relationship between performance improvements and rewards, the motivation can be lost. Finally, if the reward system does not measure employees' controllable performance, they may conclude that measured performance is independent of their efforts. Therefore, the basis of incentive compensation is the performance measurement system, which becomes the focus of the employees' attention. The decisions that employees make in pursuing the performance goals move the organization toward achieving its goals.

## **#2 Measuring Value**

Second, and related to the first attribute, the orthodontist must make a careful choice about whether to reward employee learning, demonstrated skill and time worked or measure results such as a physical measure of production or activity, or time spent doing something. In general, the greatest alignment between employee's and the organization's interests is provided when the performance measurement system monitors and rewards employee action that contributes to the organization's success. However, measuring production of an employee sometimes reflects circumstances and conditions that are beyond the employee's control and results can decrease the motivation provided by the reward system. Under circumstances where outcome measurement is difficult, orthodontists may choose to monitor and reward a combination of the two. The choice of the mix of performance measures is one of the most difficult issues in the design of performance measurement and compensation systems.

## **#3 Maintaining Practice Success Considerations**

"Third, the elements of performance that the system monitors and rewards should reflect the organization's success factors that will create long-term profitability. These factors might include quality performance, time efficiency, cost reduction, innovativeness, and customer service. Moreover, the performance measurement system must consider all facets so that employees do not sacrifice in an area that is not measured. For example, if a chairside assistant is told that the number of patients she sees in a day is the measurement factor, she may sacrifice quality and courtesy offered to the patient in order to see as many patients as possible. If a measurement factor is patients not needing to return to the office for emergency appointments due to a controllable factor by the assistant, this would be more appropriate.

## **#4 Setting Clear Standards of Performance**

Fourth, the reward system must set clear standards for performance that employees accept. If standards are either unspecified or unclear, the relationship between performance and outcome is ambiguous and therefore reduces the motivational effect of the performance reward system. For example, if the

orthodontist has set forth protocols to eliminate possibilities for poking wires between appointments, this sets a clear goal for each assistant.

### **#5 Team Reward Systems**

Fifth, when it is critical that employees coordinate decision making and other activities with other employees, the reward system should reward group, rather than individual performance. Some practices are replacing evaluations and rewards based on individual performance with rewards and evaluation based on both individual and group performance.

### **Steps for Establishing Performance Reviews**

Once the orthodontist has clarified the performance measurement and reward system, the program is then shared with the staff.

1. Review individual job descriptions with each staff member and the entire team. Give employees an opportunity to ask questions and clarify the roles for each position.
2. Explain in detail the expectations for each employee and specifically how individual (and group performance if applicable) will be measured.
3. Give the employee a copy of the performance evaluation form and schedule the initial and subsequent reviews. (If you do not have a performance appraisal system, feel free to contact Consulting Network.)
4. Monitor employee progress and give feedback regularly rather than waiting until the next review to discuss concerns and celebrate successes.
5. Adhere to the schedule allocated for employee reviews. Encourage employee to share work related strengths and development suggestions first, then add additional comments.
6. Together, develop a development plan to encourage on-going improvement and set new goals.
7. Encourage employees to share ideas of how to improve the process.

No matter how an orthodontist decides to reward employees, complementing the specifics of a job well done, thanking an employee for a good day at the office, and praising improvement are keys to motivation and are greatly appreciated by any staff member. Compensation programs are certainly important, but it must be integrated with verbal appreciation and recognition on an on-going basis to be successful.

