

The Melanies in Your Practice

Melanie wanted this job. In spite of her lack of dental experience, Dr. Roth and his team sensed that Melanie's desire, positive attitude, and intelligence would compensate. She became their hygiene assistant armed with a high school diploma, a young child, and a jobless boyfriend.

Melanie never talked much. Quietly, she performed her duties with care and precision. Dr. Roth and the team praised Melanie specifically and sincerely on her performance. Slowly her self-esteem rose. She became friends with everyone and did her job well. Dr. Roth sent Melanie to continuing-education courses, and she was learning to become a dental assistant.

Until last month.

Four weeks ago, Melanie survived a traumatic car accident. With an injury to her back and knee, a lawyer advised that she should sue the other driver and reap the benefits vis-à-vis a lawsuit. The catch: You can't work anymore.

This situation may sound appealing to many people. But not to Melanie. Her job in this dental office not only gave her an income, it gave her a new sense of self. For the first time in her life, she felt empowered, praised, and encouraged. She was happy, the team worked cohesively as a unit, and patients received the quality of care to which they were accustomed.

Melanie starts back to work next week. She will not file any lawsuits. Her back and knee have mended, and she'll continue those CE classes.

The most significant way you can empower your team members — which, in turn, will create a positive environment for your patients — which, in turn, will motivate your team to sell dentistry — is by *praising* and *complimenting* them.

I have had the honor of teaching a leadership course at The Pankey Institute to dentists in the C5 class. These attendees have already graduated from four prior courses at The Pankey Institute. They know their stuff and so do you! Yet, in all of the various Pankey groups I've taught, the attendees agreed that they failed in this area. They do not praise and compliment enough. In fact, one doctor asked, "Does this count as a compliment? I told my hygienist, 'Sue, you do such a great job with your prophys. But if you could just talk a little less and stay on time, that would make you perfect.' "

That example does *not* count as a compliment. First, your praise needs to be specific. Generally saying "You do a great job" does not register to the recipient. She won't buy it. Second, by adding the "but," you've just gone to jail without collecting your \$200. The admonition negates the praise.

Confront in private, praise in public. In a future article I'll write about how to confront others. For now, here are the rules on how to praise:

- ❶ Be specific.
- ❷ Be sincere.
- ❸ Praise in public, in front of others.
- ❹ Don't praise and then ask for a favor or give advice.
- ❺ Be proportionate — not too much or too little given the circumstance.
- ❻ Be timely.
- ❼ Praise up, down, and laterally on the totem pole of power.

Studies prove that people are motivated more by attention and approval than by money. Good pay is halfway down the list of what inspires people in the

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workplace. What really motivates us is interesting work and appreciation for work well done.

If you want your team to be persuasive and do their jobs efficiently, find specific ways to compliment them on their skills. We all want to perform at our highest levels when we know we are appreciated.

Here are examples of recognition strategies that will cost you nothing, yet will reap huge benefits: *

- ☆ Give individual, private thanks.
- ☆ Give individual, private praise.
- ☆ Extend public praise and thank yous.
- ☆ Brag on your team.
- ☆ Include your team in informal nonbusiness conversation.
- ☆ Delegate a new task.
- ☆ Include your team members' names in the office newsletter.
- ☆ Jot thank you notes.
- ☆ Write "Good Deed" cards.
- ☆ Write *thank you* on paychecks.
- ☆ Recognize your team for trying something new.
- ☆ Acknowledge your team at both ends of the day.
- ☆ Acknowledge when you make a mistake.

Finally, accept praise graciously. Sometimes we negate a compliment with, "Do you really like my hair? I need to get it cut" ... or "This outfit is so old. I can't believe you like it" ... or "That's sweet of you, you do a great job too." Say *thank you* and revel in the positive feedback.

Melanie has been a good addition to Dr. Roth's team. The patients like her, and she likes herself — all because she is praised, encouraged, and empowered.

Here are some ways to compliment others:

- ✓ Before this day ends, compliment someone in a detailed way. You will make her day.
- ✓ Concentrate on the positives rather than the negatives.
- ✓ Say something positive *when you are thinking about it*, rather than waiting and possibly losing the opportunity to actually articulate this to the recipient. All too often we give the compliment to a third person, who may or may not transmit the message.
- ✓ Share the compliment in front of others. It makes everyone feel validated.

* Source: "Excellence in Management — Bringing Out the Best in People" by Rick Conlow

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