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Staff Matters: Do You Have Quiet Quitters in Your Practice?

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Do You Have 'Quiet Quitters' in Your Practice?



By Jodi Schafer, SPHR, SHRM-SCP

Question: It seems like now that we have passed the worst of COVID-19, our staff is burnt out and unmotivated. It's hard to get anyone to go

above and beyond anymore, and it seems like so many want to do the least amount of work possible. For example, it's hard for me to find coverage for shifts when staff are taking vacation or are off sick, or to find staff to step up and take on new tasks, or to find volunteers to help organize fun events for our team. I've heard this term called "quiet quitting" and it makes me wonder if that is our problem. What advice do you have?

Answer: The phrase "quiet quitting" is relatively new and refers to employees who are still fulfilling their job duties, but not doing anything beyond the minimal amount expected for their position. These types of behaviors may include things like not volunteering to do anything extra, staying quiet during meetings instead of offering ideas, and coming into the office and leaving right at opening and closing times. If you are seeing these types of behaviors, then you may have a "quiet quitter" on your team. And you are not alone. It's been estimated that upwards of 50% of current employees are showing these tendencies.

While this pattern of behavior may be alarming, you can't apply a solution without more information. Check in with the employees you are concerned about, one-on-one, to see how they're doing. Let them know you've noticed that they seem quieter lately (or another passive behavior you have noticed), and ask if there's anything they need, or if there is anything they want to talk about. Questions like this can open the door for deeper sharing and understanding. Are the signs of burnout and lack of motivation due to the job/work environment, or are they due to a stressor in the employee's personal life over which you have no control?

If the concerns the employee shares are work-related, then communication and connection are the path for-

ward. For example, does the employee feel appreciated at work? Note that appreciation is different from recognition, in that appreciation is about the individual person and not the results being achieved. Even when an employee makes a mistake, are they still appreciated as a part of the team? Leaders have a critical role in developing the trust and relationships needed to show genuine appreciation with individual employees and teams.

Many employees also don't feel a strong connection to the bigger focus of the practice and the work. They may feel like a "cog in a machine" and thus they have disengaged as a result. In this case, recommit to communicating your vision and values for the organization and the role that every team member plays in that. Ask employees for their feedback on how things could be improved, and encourage your managers/leads to do the same. Empower staff to handle duties that may be beyond their basic responsibilities, and let them know that you believe they can make judgment calls that are in the best interest of the practice and the patients.

Continue to have regular one-on-one meetings with your team. The most successful managers/supervisors check in at least 15-30 minutes a week. This ongoing connection promotes relationship building, provides time to see how things are going — at work and at home — and shows the employee that someone at your practice cares about their success.

As humans, we are social animals, and we look for connections to help us understand our place in the world and to find fulfillment. The approach mentioned above will help you create a positive company culture, reducing the amount of quiet quitting behaviors you are experiencing and improving employee morale and engagement along the way. ●

For human resources assistance, contact Brandy Ryan, MDA director of human resources, at bryan@michigandental.org.