

# Changing the Perception of “Top Performer” into Reality

The challenge is to motivate employees to go from “good” to “great.”

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*This article is excerpted from Chapter Six of The Medical Practitioner's Survival Handbook.*

**A**t a point when I felt I had become pretty good at reading people, an eye-opening experience taught me that I still had a long way to go. The incident involved a staff member whom I felt was significantly under-performing. I told her that I wanted to meet with her after work to discuss her future with the practice, and she replied that this was quite a coincidence since she was planning to ask me for a meeting regarding this same issue. It so happened that while what I wanted was to outline just what she needed to do in order to keep her job; she had intended to meet for the purpose of asking for a raise. This left me to wonder how our perceptions could be so different. It became clear that I was not as good at reading people as I had thought, and I realized that such “gaps” in perception between me and my staff had the potential of constraining continued improvement in my practice.

A few years ago, I came across a study that helped to explain this situation. I was reviewing data from a 2007 survey conducted for *BusinessWeek* by Beta Research Corporation and was amazed at the typical response from employees across a wide range of fields when asked, “Are you

one of the top 10% of performers in your company?” Overall, 90% of the respondents answered, “Yes.” Breaking this statistic down even further, 83% of the respondents who worked in large companies (ones with more than 1,000 employees) and 96% from smaller companies (with fewer than 50 employees) responded, “Yes”. Although we know that a gap exists between perception and reality, this

of it. This is the approach we need to take with our office staff, 96% of whom, according to this *BusinessWeek* survey, perceive themselves as being in the top 10% of performers.

*BusinessWeek's* survey tells us it is likely that most people we deal with on a daily basis—including the doctors we know—believe they are in the top ten percent of their professions. How do we turn such “overly

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this is a pretty wide gap!**

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is a pretty wide gap! We can examine here how recognizing this enigma might help us in managing our practices.

We have all heard the expression that “perception is reality.” If we believe this adage and are dealing with someone whom we feel isn't really perceiving the reality of a situation, we typically focus on changing that person's perception. There are times, however, when we should be employing the opposite strategy. For example, we actually do want a staff person who feels like a top 10% performer to actually perform in the top 10%—to achieve his/her perception of reality. We want to change reality to match our “audience's” perception

optimistic” perceptions into reality? There is probably no correct answer to this question; however, just recognizing that this “performance/perception gap” exists is valuable information. The fact that our staff are typically overly optimistic regarding their abilities and contributions to the success of our practices is certainly something we need to consider when managing staff related issues, especially when we are dealing with those whom we feel are under-performing. As we seek ways to help them improve performance, we must be aware of the fact that we are walking a fine line between improving the situation and undermining

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it by reducing staff confidence and self-esteem.

Ideally, we all share the long-term goal of increasing the quali-

tion, “How do I motivate employees without undermining their confidence and self-esteem?” Key factors in achieving good to great are the support and expertise of the people who will help us along the way. We

can move forward, from “good” to “great.”

We encounter differences in individual perceptions of reality in most situations. Sometimes, these differences can be quite wide, potentially putting those who do not understand the extent of this gap at a disadvantage. Simple awareness of this discrepancy can change how we interact with people in all situations, resulting in better outcomes from our interactions and a continuous, positive impact on both our business and personal lives. **PM**

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ty and performance of our medical practices. Regardless of how well we might be performing today, we must focus on continuous improvement in order to move our practices from good to great. This “Going from Good to Great” concept (as described by Jim Collins in his book of the same title) offers an answer to the ques-

can effectively deal with (and motivate) our employees who already believe they are in the top ten percent of performers by letting them know that we recognize how “good” they already are. Following this acknowledgment, our discussions can move forward, focusing on improvement—on how they and the practice



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