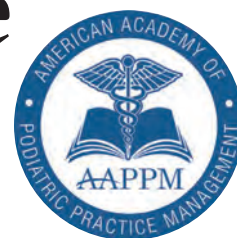




10 Signs of an Unhappy Employee



Be on the lookout for these red flags.

BY TINA DEL BUONO, PMAC

Practice Management Pearls is a regular feature that focuses on practice management issues presented by successful DPMs who are members of the American Academy of Podiatric Practice Management. The AAPPM has a fifty-plus-year history of providing its member podiatrists with the practice management education and the resources they need to practice efficiently

Although this survey points to significant management issues as the reason for employee discontent, there may be other reasons as well. As managers and physicians, how do we recognize that something may be wrong, and what can we do to address it effectively?

Since we work in medical settings, we need to look for the *symptoms* an employee may have. Even though

who usually does not procrastinate and begins to do so, it may be an indication that something is up. For some reason, the employee is disconnecting from job tasks. Putting things off and letting things pile up can cause a catastrophic event if it is allowed to go on for too long. All too often when an employee leaves because of unhappiness, the employer will find piles of hidden work undone and this can be costly.

When an employee becomes a “fault-finder” there will be no peace in the office as everyone will be on the defensive all the time.

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According to James K. Harter, PhD., Gallup’s chief scientist for workplace management, people leave companies because of factors that filter through the local work environment. At least 75% of the reasons for voluntary turnover can be influenced by managers. Still, many bosses think that all turnovers come down to money.

Money is important, but it doesn’t buy employee loyalty. Gallup conducted two polls in 2006 regarding turnover. Of those who quit their jobs, 82.8% left their companies, while 17.2% moved to a new position in the same company. When those who quit voluntarily were asked why they quit, “pay and benefits” was the second most common answer, but only 22.4% of respondents mentioned it. (Excerpt taken from Gallup Management Journal May 2008)

we cannot actually see what is going on inside the individual, by paying close attention, we are likely to detect outward *symptoms*, which may be a reflection of employee unhappiness.

Here are the 10 most common symptoms that may indicate that you have an unhappy employee.

1. Checking out—When you see employees just going through the motions of carrying out jobs without being fully engaged in what they are doing or with whom they are doing it, it may be a sign that they are seriously distracted. When employees “check out” of a situation, it is usually because something is going on that is consuming their thoughts when their mind should be on their work.

2. Procrastination—On occasion, most people will procrastinate. However, when you notice an employee

3. Lack of team effort—“All for one and one for all.” When you see a normally engaged team player starting to play solo, it is time for a locker room chat to find out what is going on and what can be done to get that team spirit back in your player.

4. Fault finding—As motivational leadership speaker Zig Ziglar said, “Some people find fault like there is a reward for it.” When nothing is ever their fault and they can consistently find fault in others, take note. It may be because they are unhappy, feeling poorly about themselves and would like to bring others down to their level. When an employee becomes a “fault-finder” there will be no peace in the office as everyone will be on the defensive all the time.

5. Lack of accountability—This symptom can be a costly one and needs to be addressed quickly, because you, the physician, are legally responsible for your employees. When an employee fails to be accountable for actions and it appears as though it is not a big deal to him/her, you are putting

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your practice at risk. Employees at all times need to be able to demonstrate the following three attributes to their employer: (1) Answerability, (2) Responsibility, and (3) Liability. Under the legal principle of *vicarious liability*, the physician is ultimately responsible for the actions of his or her staff. This means not only are employees responsible for their actions, but the physician is also responsible for the actions of their employees.

6. Insubordination—Bad behavior should never be overlooked and reach the point of insubordination. Disrespect of authority, direct defiance, and total lack of respect for those in the workplace will likely destroy team morale, jeopardize patient referral sources, and disrupt patient care. There is no quick fix for those who are insubordinate. They often have a sense of entitlement and disrespect for authority figures. They may have some good qualities, but the longer they are permitted to act out, the worse the situation will get.

7. Resistance to change—Change in the workplace can be difficult for any employee, but when you have

Some Suggestions of How to Respond to Symptoms of Unhappy Employees

- 1** Watch and listen to how the employees are behaving, take a few notes, and ask to speak to them privately.
- 2** Tell them what you have noticed and express your concern that they might not be happy and ask how you can help.
- 3** Listen to what they have to say, and ask questions for clarification so that you understand what is going on in their life to make them have these behavior changes.
- 4** Tell them what is expected from them as far as their attitude and behavior in the workplace, and ask if they understand.
- 5** Let them know that you are willing to work with them as long as they realize that they too must work to restore their positive attitude and to keep the lines of communication open. **PM**

low morale, you can bet the rest of your staff is probably not too happy either. Management staff is expected to motivate, guide, and train the office staff. An unhappy manager will

tell between 7-10 of their friends and family of a bad experience.

As a business owner, you may be surprised at how much your employees will appreciate the fact that you have taken notice that they are unhappy and may be having a difficult time. Sometimes, all it takes is to offer understanding and support. **PM**

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an employee who is unhappy, s(he) may resist making any type of change unless it is personally beneficial. An unhappy employee may put more effort into complaining about having to make the change than what it would take to implement the change.

8. Negativity—When you start to hear an employee who normally has a pretty balanced attitude complain or speak negatively more than normal about everyday matters, pay attention. Someone is having problems and those problems are overflowing into work life. Negativity is an infectious disease and can pass from one employee to another very quickly.

9. Low morale of management—If you have an office manager with

find it difficult to carry out responsibilities effectively. Remember what the Gallup poll showed: more staff members quit their job because of the office manager than they do because they do not like the job.

10. Patient complaints—We know that we cannot please every patient and at times we will have personality clashes, but if a patient complains about the attitude of an employee, take the time to listen. One complaint could be nothing, but repeated complaints may indicate that there is a problem. Our commitment is to help patients. Even when there is a personality issue, the patient is to receive top service. It is estimated that one unhappy patient will likely



Tina has been a practice manager for 25 years. She lectures nationally on practical practice management, specializing in Complete Practice Efficiencies, Team Building, Staffing Issues, Manager Training and mentoring and Practice

Building Protocols. Tina is the author of “*Truth from the Trenches, The Complete Guide to Creating a High-Performing, Inspired Medical Team.*” She has authored over 400 articles on practice management and has developed GPS—Global Practice Systems—to create the road map to get your practice from where it is now to where you want it to be, in small practical, achievable steps. She is the Director/Coach and Consultant for Top Practices Virtual Practice Management Institute and manages the practice of her husband, John Hollander, DPM in Santa Rosa Ca.