Are you the problem in the practice?

By Sally McKenzie

Are you the problem child in your office? Most practices have one at sometime or another. Often, this person is blissfully unaware of how their behaviors are interpreted by others, or worse yet, they don’t care.

They disregard the negative impact they’re having on the team and production overall. They tend to make excuses for their behavior with comments such as, “Well that’s just the way I am.” Trust me, anyone can change, and so can they. “I just call it as I see it.” That’s fine but the rest of the team doesn’t necessarily want to hear it. “Doctor knew what he was getting when he hired me.” Uh, probably not.

The problem child is the one who regularly complains about her/his teammates, the doctor, the hours, the parking, the phone, or the schedule. You name it, she/he has something to say about it. Pay attention to your comments. Are you never at a loss for something negative to say? If you have a legitimate issue or complaint, bring it up with the person who can take action, or suggest to the doctor that the matter be discussed during a staff meeting where everyone can offer input as to how to address it. Otherwise, leave the whining to the 2-year-olds.

In addition to being the practice’s top complainer, the problem child is likely Tell-all Tammy, the office pot-stirrer. “Did you hear about Mrs. Wentworth? Well, let me tell you...” “Did you happen to notice the doctor’s husband hasn’t been in as much lately? You know what I think...” The problem child asserts that she/he is just making conversation. Call it what you want, but it’s gossip and it’s poison for any practice. Pick a different topic, the weather, the sales at the mall, a good book you’ve read, a new recipe you’ve tried. That is making conversation.

The problem child is undependable because she/he is frequently late for work, citing this excuse or that. Set the alarm earlier. Allow more time to get your child to daycare. Pack your lunch the night before. You’re accountable to your teammates, and it starts with showing up on time.

The problem child isn’t open to doing things any differently. This person digs in at the mere suggestion that a system be changed or improved to enhance efficiency and/or patient service. “I’ve been doing it this way for five years; it works just fine.” Pay attention to the barriers you’re erecting in the way of system improvement. Be open to change and you’ll benefit from the opportunity to learn something new.

The problem child also probably has precisely defined her/his specific job duties, and if someone asks her/him to do something that isn’t on that list, they can expect either a “that’s not my job” response or something along the lines of, “I’m always having to clean up after so-and-so.” The problem child moans that she/he has enough responsibilities and doesn’t have time for anyone else’s. But teammates back each other up. When one needs help, another steps in willingly and with a smile.

The problem child is often unable to hide her/his irritation with others. The silent treatment is a common weapon in the arsenal of negative behaviors. Then there are the rolling eyes and sighs of disgust that waft across the room. Ask her/him a question and you can be sure to get the attitude. Check the attitude at the door, and watch how much more effective you become when you take a pleasant and helpful demeanor with others.

The problem child is promising to quit at any moment. Everyone wishes she/he would fulfill that pledge, but she/he just continues to hang on and spread the misery far and wide. The unfortunate irony is that oftentimes, the problem child could be the office superstar. She/he is bright and talented, but the attitude, the negative and potentially destructive behaviors, unfortunately, often drive off the truly excellent employees. The practice, meanwhile, just trudges along, with the problem employee(s) in tow.

So, are you the problem child? If so, do yourself and your teammates a favor and either quit or clean it up. While you’re at it, count your lucky stars because you should have been fired or at least put on notice long before now.

Interested in speaking to Sally about your practice concerns? E-mail her at sallymck@mckenziegmt.com.