

TITLE: Dealing with Behavior Issues –Am I the Problem Employee ?!

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Your Typical Day

It's Wednesday morning and you are arriving at work. A sense of doom and despair grows in the pit of your stomach as you pull into the parking lot. Your mind starts going through the list...the narcissistic manager, the crabby clients who always yell at you, that stupid tech who is always smiling while stabbing you in the back. The list seems to grow longer as the months go by. You find yourself faking a smile as you walk in the door.

Sound familiar? Are you that person with the gloom and doom feelings? How do you respond to those feelings? How do others respond to you? If I asked you to tell me why you feel this way, would you start pointing fingers at all those other team members and clients? After all, they are the ones causing you problems – right? What if I told you to look at your hand that is pointing at everyone else and focus on the three fingers pointing back at you? Would you be able to take the heat and consider that you might be that problem employee?

I'm the Problem!?

How dare anyone suggest that you, the hardworking, always on time, experienced employee be the problem! Humor the thought; perhaps even justify the finger pointing, by considering the following:

"I Don't Get Paid Enough to Do This"

If this is a common utterance from your mouth, you may be a problem employee. Perhaps the ego is getting in the way or maybe it is a case of laziness. Take a hard look at the situation. A star employee is often asked to take on other tasks that may not be their job, however, it is supporting the mission and vision of the practice and it improves patient care, client service and business success...so they do it.

"I'm Surrounded by Idiots (I'm Smarter than Everyone Else)"

Are you really so much smarter – or are you just acting like a know-it-all? Do you find yourself getting angry when anyone questions you? You may be a problem employee. A star employee treats coworkers and clients with respect, and feels that everyone on the practice team does make a significant difference in the lives of the clients and their pets.

"That Was Her/His Job, Not Mine"

Consider this statement as a form of 'passing the buck' or showing a lack of accountability. If this were a surgery and the patient died, does it change the outcome? Would it be better to function as a team – communicating frequently and detailing jobs? A star would work hard to set not only personal performance goals, but to also set team goals and strive to put forth the utmost best effort to move the team toward success. The idea is not to cover for a slacker, but instead, to work as a team toward team success and holding everyone accountable without jeopardizing the safety and health of pets or people.

"Did You Hear About...(Gossiping)"

Every employee handbook has a statement about not gossiping, yet it seems that there are always a few people in the practice who thrive on the activity (they cannot be referred to as team members when they participate in gossiping). Gossiping is a way to pass judgment on others, to degrade and cause strife within the team. Rather than gossiping, a star employee will recognize achievements in the team, speaking positively and with great pride in the personal achievements of others or a group.

"I Hate Walking in Here. I Don't Want to Work Here"

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These statements are usually followed by a litany of all the things hated by the employee. This person lacks any engagement with the team or the mission of the business, and spewing their list only brings others around them down. Recognizing that not every day is a cakewalk in the veterinary practice, star employees will make all attempts to maintain and exhibit a positive attitude, taking pride in their appearance and job performance.

Yikes! I Am a Problem Employee

Achieving this level of self-awareness, that ability to recognize your personality and behaviors, is a difficult skill. It is a skill that eludes many (Salpeter). It is a skill that takes time to develop. It is a process of identifying your strengths and weaknesses, and how you can match your strengths to certain roles. It is being able to accept feedback from others and take action to change your behavior (instead of trying to force everyone else to change for you).

If any of the previous statements are a part of your daily communication, recognize the opportunity to improve and provide value to the business and patient care. Many of these utterances carry with them body language and additional behaviors that can, and will, be picked up by clients. Some of the statements are uttered as a passive-aggressive attempt at getting a point across. However, the only result is a negative impact – often on the speaker. The problem employee keeps getting to be more and more of a problem with continued negative verbiage.

The first step on the road to improvement is self-awareness. The second step is to seek honest feedback (Nishi). Do not approach a coworker and ask if you are a problem employee! Instead, ask - “what should I be working on” or “how did I come across with Carol in surgery?” The third step is to great an action plan to change behaviors based on the feedback. Get the help of a trusted coworker or manager to understand the action plan, offer feedback and even coach you through some tough issues. In the end, you find yourself pointing fingers less often and actually offering a helping hand to others suffering from problem employee syndrome.

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