

Five Steps to Deal with “Energy Suckers” on your Team

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Dr. Frank Spear said during his *Practice of Excellence* course last fall that there are two kinds of employees in a dental practice: “There are energy takers and there are energy givers.” I’ll go as far as to replace the words “energy takers” with “energy suckers” for a more visual sense of the concept.

Energy Suckers

Often referred to as “energy vampires,” these are employees who have a negative attitude or limited potential for your style of practice. They often complain and clearly blame others for things that happen to them. Suckers are not just negative employees. They can be very nice people who simply do not have the skill set and drive for your style of practice. They steal energy from what you are trying to do with your patients. They take energy from you doing the things you love. By employing them, you make concessions to your vision. That makes them “energy suckers.”

It is very important to understand that there is a greater danger than just the employee alone when you choose to employ an “energy sucker.” Spear explains that it exposes you to what he calls the “lowest common denominator” factor, and your practice is only as strong as its weakest link. He goes on to explain that when you have one “energy sucker” you actually have two, because “energy suckers” need someone to plug into. So they will seek out another employee in the practice to commiserate with.

Energy Givers

People who bring life to your practice, they have a “can do” attitude. They believe in your vision and where you are going—often more than you do. They like goals. They “GET IT.” They accept the responsibility for what happens in their lives. They just make you feel good when you see their

face every morning. They lift you up and pull you toward your vision and beyond. They push you to do the things you love to do in dentistry. They scare you at times by working ahead of you. Most importantly, they sell “YOU.” All of this makes them “energy givers.”

I heard Jack Canfield say, “The power of teamwork is greatly misunderstood by even the best minds in business. When you have an employee who can do average tasks, $1 + 1 = 2$, but when you have team members with talent and a positive attitude, they make the equation $1 + 1 = 11$.”

His point was that one really talented and willing team member can do things that two or three average employees could not do collectively.

He is right.

When you have the right people on the bus, it goes places you have never been before, and besides, the ride is so much smoother.

An important key to enjoying your career is to *surround yourself with the right people*. Having the wrong people around you for too long can actually start to affect your attitude about prosthodontics. It can affect how you feel about yourself. And you are crazy if you do not think that message does not translate to your patients.

“Suckers” and “Givers” in Your Personal Life

The same principle applies in your personal life too. You learn this a little bit as you mature as an adult, but you learn it more profoundly when you start a family.

There are people who “suck” energy, and there are people who “give” energy to you in your personal life.

Think about that for a second.

“Suckers” pull you off track for your vision for your family. My wife and I have friends that we have to limit our time with, simply because we do not share the same values. It does not mean they are bad people, or that we are better than they are. It just means we do not want to expose our valuable

time and the impressionable minds of our children to their negative attitudes, values, or beliefs.

Life is fluid. You are never coasting. You are moving either toward your vision for your life or away from it. Rest assured that “energy suckers,” no matter how slight, are pulling you off course.

All of this could be said for some patients too. Be sure to spend most of your time with patients who are mostly “energy givers.” Then start to limit your scheduled time with those patients who “suck energy” from you and your team. You’ll be happy you did.

Here are 5 Steps to Deal with “Energy Suckers”:

1. **Make sure that you are not the problem first.** If you have a negative attitude about things, chances are you are attracting a lot of people who share the same beliefs and want to commiserate with you (consciously or unconsciously). Read the definition of a “sucker” or a “giver” above. Which category do you fall into as a prosthodontist? Start there before reading on.
2. **Work on making your practice an attractive place to work.** As one of my mentors, Jim Rohn, used to say, “To attract attractive people, you must first become attractive.” Talented dental auxiliaries are always doing more homework on you than you are on them during the interview process. Don’t forget that. By nature, people want to attach themselves to a train that is going places. They don’t want to hook up to a train that is lost and hasn’t gone anywhere exciting in the last few years. Which train are you? If you become the train that is going places, it is no accident, and you will find that energy givers will be seeking you out.
3. **Train your team!** I have three words for you: train, train, train. I hear dentists ask all the time, “What if I train my team and they leave?” Well, I have a better question for you: What if you DON’T... and THEY STAY!? Which puts you in a worse situation? Only you can answer that question. Pay for it in training now or pay for it later in more unpleasant ways—either way you are going to pay for it. You choose. As you train, you will be less tolerant for the way things used to be, which ultimately will force you to start seeking (and begin attracting) the right kind of employees.
4. **Address the “energy sucking” right away if you suspect it.** Experienced prosthodontists will tell you the profundity of this lesson. Every

month you wait to address the “energy sucking,” it pushes back your vision and increases your stress. Sit down with this team member and clearly outline the behaviors you expect for the position they hold. This is very important. Don’t criticize the person. Instead, explain your needs and attributes of the position. Make it clear. Tell the employee that you will review his performance again in 30 days. Set a date. Keep the date and follow through. If there is no progress, then make a decision to part ways. I think you will be startled with the results of this management method. We have seen some great turnarounds when a dentist gets clear about expectations. It is also important to realize that some leopards can’t change their spots. Most team members have skills that can be greatly improved through training, but their attitudes and work ethic very rarely experience a dramatic transformation.

5. **Design your DREAM TEAM on paper.** Make sure you can see each person clearly; his or her personalities, talents, attributes and responsibilities. Once you have a visual picture of what you want, make every effort for the rest of your career to NOT compromise this vision.

Make a consistent effort to realize this concept in your personal life too.

There is nothing more powerful in the practice of prosthodontics than having the right people around you... all who “give you energy.” Prosthodontics really becomes its most fun when you sit in your morning huddle with a fresh cup of coffee, look at the smiling faces around you, and think to yourself, “Here is my dream team!”

Jim Collins, who wrote the book, *Good to Great* said that for the longest time we have been led to believe that “people were our greatest asset. This is not true. Only the RIGHT people are our greatest asset.”

Life is short; make your journey fun with “energy givers.”

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