

Dentists Behaving Badly

Do Away with Bad Habits and Regain Control of Your Practice and Your Life

Do you want a better practice or even a better life? The way to get there is pretty simple: You need to stop and think before you move forward.

As entrepreneurs and leaders, we often become so wrapped up in responsibilities that we can't see how we get in our own way. We have trained ourselves to fix or improve a situation by taking action, but, in some cases, eliminating or minimizing a negative behavior is a more accurate method to achieving our goals. This might surprise you, but you will get more of what you want out of life if you take the time to identify the negative behaviors that drive your family, friends, colleagues, and patients crazy—and simply stop doing them! You may think that you know yourself and your mannerisms better than anyone else, but sometimes it's hard for us to be objective about our own habits.

“Would it be worth stopping a negative behavior if it made you and your family, team, and patients happier?”

If you want to understand what's holding you back, simply ask those around you and hope that they are comfortable enough to tell you the truth. You can broach the subject by asking those close to you to fill in the blanks of the following statement: “[Your name] would be a better [spouse, doctor, parent, business owner], if he/she stopped [behavior].” Listen well, do not give excuses, and offer sincere appreciation. Honest feedback is always a gift. If you have trouble getting forthright answers or don't feel comfortable asking others to evaluate your behavior, you should try to be your own assessor.

Here are some common examples of negative behavior that you might want to look for:

- Sarcastic comments: Sarcasm is not wit.
- Eye rolling: It is always rude to roll your eyes, no matter the circumstance.
- Sharp tone of voice: When you're angry, your lack of emotional control may be the only message your audience gets.
- Perpetual lateness: Tardiness will cause people to doubt your integrity and priorities.
- Publicly criticizing others: This is one of the least motivating behaviors a leader can display.

- Failure to express gratitude: Gratitude is important for those who support you, and thanking others will make them and you feel better.
- Passing judgment: Never assume. Learn and understand first.
- Negativity: Negative language is a put-off. Using it makes you an unpleasant person who others will avoid.
- Making excuses: The reason why you didn't keep a commitment doesn't make others feel any better about the results. Sometimes a simple apology is much more appropriate.
- Punishing the messenger: Delivering bad news is difficult enough, so berating those who relay the message makes you look like the bad guy.
- Adding your two cents: You don't always need to add your opinion to every idea or discussion.
- Not listening: Some people consider this to be a passive-aggressive form of disrespect.

Some of you may read these examples and think of people in your life who demonstrate one or more of these behaviors. Stop! Let's be honest. We are all guilty of some or all of these actions, either now or in the past. They are part of being human. Think about what could be different in your practice or your life. What if one of these behaviors was holding you back? Would it be worth stopping a negative behavior if it made you and your family, team, and patients happier?

First, determine which behavior your team would most like for you to stop. Then, ask your team for help in making this change. Give them permission to “fine” you \$1 each time they catch you exhibiting that negative behavior. In addition, each time you give an excuse as to why you were reverting to old, bad habits, they get to double the fine. By the time you meet the challenge and truly break the habit, you will have plenty of money set aside to reward yourself and those who helped you to eliminate the negative behavior. Your entire team will have fun, and everyone will benefit. ♦



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