**Before You Offer a Bonus, Consider Your Plan**

BY FRONT OFFICE ROCKS | MAY 18, 2018 | NEWS, STAFF CONTROL

At the beginning of each year, bonuses are a popular topic in the dental industry. This makes sense, as dentists are trying to figure out how to make the new year better than the last. Many clinicians look for ways to motivate their team to hit new goals for the year, and bonuses have become the go-to method.

THERE ARE FOUR THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE YOU PUT A BONUS PLAN INTO PLACE:

* MOTIVATION
* EXPECTATION
* FEEDBACK
* AND NOVELTY.
* WHAT’S THEIR MOTIVATION?

Not every individual is motivated by money.

A cash bonus is often the incentive offered for reaching a certain goal, but money is not necessarily a strong motivation for everyone. By offering a cash bonus, dentists may feel like they are motivating the team with a strong incentive to reach the goal, but money is not always what the employees want.

The key here is to know your team.

If you aren’t certain what the best possible type of incentive for your staff would be, ask them! Find out what the team would love to get in return for hitting a certain goal. The advantage to surveying the team before implementing a bonus plan is that you will have total buy-in to participate in trying to accomplish the goal.

BONUSES SHOULD NOT BE ROUTINE

Bonuses don’t feel like a bonus if they’re always offered.

In other words, it is important to offer a bonus plan randomly, so bonuses are not something the team starts to expect. When you offer the same bonus month after month and the goal is reached on a regular basis, the employees can tend to expect the bonus. It becomes routine. When a bonus becomes an expectation, it’s no longer an incentive. It is supposed to be something that motivates employees to work harder and strive for more.

The number one way a bonus plan backfires is when it becomes the new normal and employees expect it.

Then, it evolves into a negative thing when team members don’t get a bonus or get less than they expected. Suddenly, your positive motivator has caused disgruntled employees. You can avoid this scenario by making sure that bonuses feel special and unusual, not routine.

FEEDBACK IS STILL ESSENTIAL

Don’t use money in lieu of offering positive feedback to the employees.

Many studies show that employees thrive on verbal and/or written feedback from their superiors, and many times, dentists aren’t good at providing that feedback. It is important to understand that a financial incentive is not going to replace letting your employees know you appreciate them and thanking them for their hard work. Even employees who are highly motivated by a possible financial reward still need to hear directly from you that they are valued team members.

KEEP IT NEW AND INTERESTING

Make sure to mix it up and play different bonus games at different times.

Some offices only offer bonuses on one thing, such as production or collections. However, it is important to adapt the bonus plan to things that are important to the office at a specific point in time. For example, focus on more online reviews by patients or getting more new patients scheduled. Mixing it up not only is good for the office because it helps your team focus on a variety of different goals, it also is more fun for the employees as it offers new and different areas to focus on. When you host the same program over and over, it can get boring, causing the team to lose interest. In the same way that many people are motivated primarily by financial reward or by positive feedback, some employees will be highly motivated by novelty—having a variety of new goals to focus on.

There is a strategy to offering bonuses or creating games with your team.

Just as production, collections, and marketing can specifically benefit from a bonus plan, you will find that these types of goals or games can also increase employee morale and help the team come together.

Simply offering a bonus isn’t enough.

When you devise a bonus plan that changes over time and takes employee desire into consideration, you will be more successful and have more fun.