

# When Good Intentions Produce the Wrong Results

I work with clinics everyday, where the leaders have the best intentions, yet inadvertently send the wrong messages regarding problem behaviors. By being patient, attentive, listening and caring...they may also give the unintended message "*There is nothing you can do about it.*"

Two very good intentions which can lead to poor results:

## 1. **Being a good, attentive listener**

Everyone knows that the ability to be an active listener is a key leadership skill. When people are upset and wanting to talk, a good leader is motivated to want to listen and soothe. How could this produce the wrong results?

Listening is a very affirming experience, the person venting often comes away feeling validated and under the impression that "someone else is now going to do something about his or her problem". But, what if their view of the problem is one-sided or distorted; their venting style is to personally attack, criticize or put the entire blame on the other person; or the person who needs to solve the problem is them self, not you?

Here's a typical "venting" example,

*Doctor Jones is impossible to work with. He is such a big baby, expecting everyone to jump sky high at his slightest request. Then if he doesn't get his way, he throws a tantrum like a two year old. No one can work with him. How come you aren't doing anything about this?*

### Good Intentions, Better Results

- Have ground rules for "venting": no personal attacks, focus on a specific incident, speak in a calm voice.
- After the initial venting of the problem, redirect the conversation to either "learning" or "problem solving". For example, "what is your learning from this?" "how do you think the other person would describe the problem?" or "If you had the opportunity to do it again, how would you do it differently?"
- Reinforce the value that the more people can solve their disagreements together the stronger the clinic. Ask "How can I help you have this conversation with the person?"

## 2. **Being patient:**

Being patient is a wonderful quality: not feeling compelled to address every mistake, giving people the time to learn, working to keep conflict and tension out of the work environment. The problem is when a leader exercises patience in the clinic setting when there are

behaviors going on that everyone can see are a problem. Sarcastic remarks in meetings, refusal to talk with co-workers or overtly pouting, raised voices and public criticism. Members of the team can see or hear the behavior, the leader is seeing or hearing the behavior....and yet there is no visible response. It is quite common for a leader to be thinking "I need to address this but it is better to do it privately. I don't want to embarrass the person in front of co-workers or patients. I'll talk with the person later." The problem with exercising patience in the face of "open disregard" is that there are several unintentional, incorrect messages being conveyed to employees: inappropriate behavior is allowable in the workplace, even the leader doesn't know how to respond, I need to just tolerate it.

### Good intentions, Better Results

- Calmly stop the action
- Redirect to success
- Meet with the person privately, and let them know that you will be going back to the work team with the agreements from the conversation.
- Coach the clinic members to learn how to "stop the action" and "redirect to success" themselves.

#### *Examples:*

- *"Sarcasm is confusing. Could you tell me directly what you are thinking?"*
- *"I can see that something is bothering you in the way you are moving around the clinic. I need you to figure out a way to solve your problem in a way that it doesn't impact your co-workers and patients."*
- *"Excuse me, I am overhearing your conversation. Could you please take it to a quieter location and in a different manner?"*

A key step in changing behaviors which are detrimental to a health care team is to switch from allowing and even encouraging behavior, to a response which discourages counterproductive behavior and redirects it to something that is much more helpful to the functioning of the team. Listen and redirect. Use patience in the moment by calmly interrupting and redirecting.